

'NEVSKY'

Reiner Offers Calm Grandeur

BY DON HENAHAN

To a season which already has produced lofty performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Honegger's "A Christmas Cantata." Fritz Reiner Thursday night added the powerful "Alexander Nevsky" cantata of Prokofiev.

And a Missa Solemnis is still to come, as a crown to this year of choral masterworks.

THE FEVER and excitement latent in this muscular music originally part of the score for the Sergei Eisenstein movie, was brought out by Reiner gradually with a slow-fuse sort of detonation.

The climactic "Battle on the Ice" was approached with expansive calm and deliberation, and thus aroused the audience's martial blood properly.

A conductor who tries to pile climax after climax into this work can never achieve the hair-raising thrust that Reiner drew from Margaret Hillis's Chicago Symphony Chorus at such a moment. No one can write a march like Prokofiev, and it was grand to hear this one played with power but without hysterics.

THE CHORUS, although called on for less heroic vocal effort than in some other works it has sung, produced a pleasing sound in all voices, and a more homogeneous tone than at any time since Miss Hillis began her missionary work in Chicago.

The mezzo-soprano solo part, entitled "Field of the Dead," was taken by Rosalind Elias, a young lady who has been known to us chiefly through secondary roles with the Metropolitan Opera.

Her voice is not of sufficient size or range for such solo efforts as this (she displayed almost no audible lower register at all) but her upper tones were pretty enough.

FORTUNATELY her vocal part immediately followed the "Battle on the Ice" and the lack of nuance with which she sang all evening was not as annoying here as in the "Poem of Love and of the Sea" of Chausson, which she essayed before intermission.

Subtlety of interpretation and mood-setting are everything in this music. Miss Elias was not had, but she is not the girl for this part.

NOTE: Fritz Reiner, all but silenced by a sore throat, rehearsed the orchestra this week using a microphone. He has promised its glum and embittered members that as soon as his voice returns he will explain more fully his arcane reasons for calling off the European tour.

Many outsiders who have been hopefully searching for such explanations also wish his voice a speedy recovery.