

Anne-Sophie Mutter at the Concertgebouw.

Entering the Concertgebouw - Amsterdam's comfortable concert hall - you note the several ante-rooms that line the corridor surrounding the auditorium. None of them serves spirits but two offer champagne. Perhaps the spirits are available in the largest of the ante-rooms where tonight's concert sponsor, an accounting firm, is giving a private reception. Entering the auditorium you are pleased by the cream and gilded decoration and the names of composers in roundels on the front of the balcony: Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Grieg and, surprisingly, Rontgen. Was he not the inventor of the x-ray? Enquiry reveals he was the cousin of the Dutch scientist and also a friend of Brahms and Grieg. He produced more than 650 works and so well merits his place on the balcony.

As the orchestra file in to take their seats on the stage, dominated by a 60 feet high Victorian organ, so does the accounting firm and its guests. The partners first, older, gregarious and wearing yellow ties, then the younger staff, keen, serious, with their wives nicely dressed in their best. A subdued chatter around the hall and then silence followed by enthusiastic clapping as the orchestra stands for the conductor of tonight's concert, Andre Previn. Now 78 and much loved, Maestro Previn is stooped and slow of movement, has difficulty mounting the rostrum and finally there, smiles amiably at the audience before perching on a high stool for the performance. He then conducts a wonderfully vigorous performance of a Glinka overture, with a limp wrist and his forefinger used as a baton. The audience is generous with its applause - Concertgebouw audiences are famous for this - and then the Maestro shuffles off the rostrum and sits on a chair given up by the first cellist, to await the arrival of Miss Mutter. She soon appears, in a scarlet off-the-shoulder dress, dangling her violin and a white napkin which later she rests on her shoulder. She and Mr Previn embrace - they were, remember, married for four years until recently - and off we go with Tchaikowski's Violin concerto in D. The one perfectly adapted to Miss Mutter's vigorous style and phenomenal attack. One worries for Mr. Previn's ability to control such energy, but he is up to the task and the performance is rousing and thrilling. At one stage, such is Miss Mutter's spirit and dash, that the threads on her bow keep breaking. She shrugs them off, grinning at her equally amused and equally happy conductor. We arrive at the end of a roller-coaster performance and the audience rises in applause and shouts. The Concertgebouw audiences are famous for their standing ovations. Miss Mutter leaves and so do a sizeable number of the audience who evidently came to see her and are not particularly interested in Rachmaninov's Second Symphony which is to follow the interval. Members of the audience in search of something more warming than champagne repair to the Wiener Café on the ground floor.

When Mr. Previn is once more installed on his stool, we enter that mixture of bombastic horns and sickly sentimental strings that is Rachmaninov's Second. Hollywood found an inexhaustible quarry in this music for its films so a lot of it is horribly familiar. It seems as though it will never end until Mr. Previn has finally worked his way through the successive crescendi of howling strings and clashing cymbals and we are released. The audience stands and applauds the conductor and the orchestra, lengthily and then we all

wander, happy, invigorated, chatting, out of the high front doors, under the gilded cherub holding his gilded lyre, atop the building.