



Minnesota Orchestra

MINNEAPOLIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
FOUNDED 1903

**1968-69
Season
66th Year**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
SYMPHONY SERIES

**Stanislaw Skrowaczewski,
Music Director**

**George Trautwein,
Associate Conductor**

Program Notes

By M. A. FELDMAN

Atmosphères, for Large Orchestra without Percussion

By György Ligeti

Born in Diczözentmarton, Transylvania, May 28, 1923; now living in Vienna.

Instrumentation: 4 flutes (interchangeable with 4 piccolos), 4 oboes, 4 clarinets (interchangeable with 4 E-flat clarinets), 3 bassoons and contrabassoon, 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, tuba, piano (using two players) and strings.

BACKGROUND

Though György Ligeti's *Atmosphères* appears on this program as a local premiere, the score has probably been experienced before by many people in this concert hall. If you are one of them, you may recall that as you waited for the adventure film "2001: A Space Odyssey" to begin, the theatre was flooded with swelling orchestral timbres; this prologue was repeated after intermission. Later, when the astronaut was hurtled past Jupiter to the infinite beyond, the dizzying psychedelic images were so integrated with the surging musical textures that your eye and ear may not have separated the two sensuous experiences. Ligeti's score, together with portions of his *Requiem* and *Lux Aeterna*, was put to as effective use for this novel film as was that floating Viennese waltz of Johann Strauss Jr., *The Blue Danube*, to which cinema fans could indulge in a vicarious zero-gravity trip to the moon.

Ligeti is a Hungarian who fled his country immediately after the uprising of 1956. For the next two years he worked in the Studio for Electronic Music of the West German Radio at Cologne. In 1959 he was appointed instructor at the International Courses for New Music in Darmstadt, and since then he has emerged as a mentor of experimental music, his works performed at festivals all over the world. When the Buffalo Festival of the Arts Today presented his *Poème Symphonique for One Hundred Metronomes*, that upstate New York community was host to a minor musical sensation that doesn't often happen in America.

For the first performance of *Atmosphères* in the United States, by the New York Philharmonic on January

25, 1964, Ligeti wrote an introduction to his musical thinking that is our best means of approaching this unique score. He began: "My most basic aim as a composer is the re-vivification of the sonorous aspect of musical form. Those factors of contemporary composition which do not manifest themselves directly as acoustical experience seem to me of only secondary importance. However, this emphatically does not mean that I intend to limit myself to the invention of new tone colors or other sound-phenomena. It is much more important to me to discover new musical forms and new manner of expression. My personal development began with serial music, but today I have passed beyond serialism. In *Atmosphères*, I have attempted to supersede the 'structural' approach to music which once, in turn, supersede the motivic-thematic approach, and to establish a new textural concept of music. In this kind of music, there are no 'events,' but only 'states,' no contours or forms, but instead, an uninhabited, imaginary musical space. Tone color, usually a vehicle of musical form, is liberated from form to become an independent musical entity."

Ligeti stresses the salient characteristic of his score: "... the sonorous texture is so dense that the individual interwoven instrumental voices are absorbed into the general texture and completely lose their individuality. This new, unaccustomed orchestral sound results from the fact that the sound of each individual instrument (consisting of a number of 'partial' tones) is itself a 'partial' of a still more complex acoustical structure."

Ligeti, whose *Atmosphères* dates from 1961, is a pioneer in the "texture" music of the 1960's. To produce

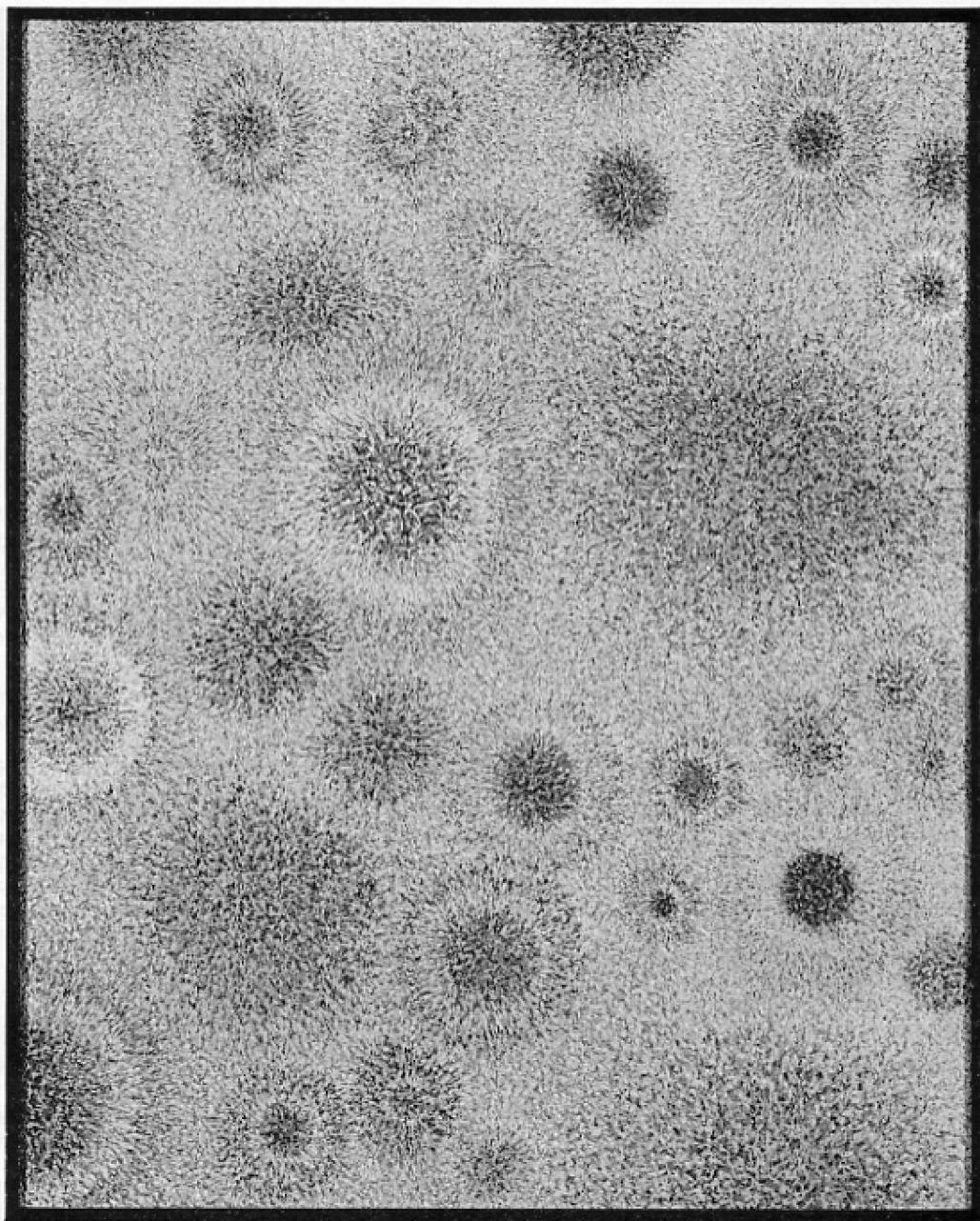
To provide a visual dimension for the music of Ligeti's *Atmosphères*, an exhibition of 20 paintings from the *Genesis* series of Aribert Munzner is on view in the University Gallery on the third floor of Northrop Auditorium (South Gallery). Mr. Munzner is Associate Professor on the faculty of The Minneapolis School of Art.

these amorphous, interwoven textures that were exploited so brilliantly in the space film, Ligeti uses the most precise notation (there is nothing aleatoric about this music) and offers judicious guidelines to conductor and players. A study of the score, dedicated to the memory of the late Hungarian composer, Mátyás Seiber, suggests how pervasive Ligeti's influence has been during this decade, though most of his disciples would appear unimaginative by comparison. In order to enjoy *Atmosphères*, we must listen to it on its own terms, accepting the premise that this music is conceived non-melodically. To grasp its musical syntax, let us review some aspects of its style and technique.

THE MUSIC

Though its subject matter evokes our fantasies about space, and might likely have tapped the percussion battery for imagistic timbres, Ligeti has dispensed with that segment of the orchestra save for some peculiar services from the piano. His approach is not merely to interweave the remaining sections of the orchestra, but to interlace the individual players within those units. The string instruments function completely *divisi*; that is, each player has his own part. Consequently, the score spreads over a gigantic total of eighty-seven staves. At the beginning, for example, in a seemingly weightless texture marked *Molto sostenuto*, each string player sounds a different note, warned by the composer to change his bow so inconspicuously that there is a real flow to the cluster of pitches. While the concertmaster intones C-sharp, his stand-partner plays B, and the two violins behind them extract C and B-flat, and so on through the strings.

(Continued)



"Genesis—1968, #4" (Casein and vinyl on plexiglas 20" x 16"), by Aribert Munzner, Associate Professor, The Minneapolis School of Art.

"Life Begins!

Its Mystery Evades Us

And We Are Left

With a Sense of Wonder.

An Instant Disappears

Into Eternity

But a Symbol Remains

Like a Twinkling Star."

(Aribert Munzner)