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THE Arts

Inside Crumbling Walls, Sounds of Bells and Copland

I may not be the best person to write about "Traces," at the Angel Orensanz Center on Wednesday night. A listener indifferent to, uninformed about or just plain

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**MUSIC
REVIEW**

hostile to the classical-music world and its conventions might be better — someone coaxed into this multimedia event and then presented with its sales pitch.

Paul Haas and his orchestra Sympho make the case, as they did in their "Rewind" concert almost two years ago, that classical music will not win new friends until it escapes worn-out rituals and enters atmospheres touched by visual effects, the cunning arrangement of musical materials and a little theater.

Speaking from the ranks of the already converted, I think the event's main argument came from the music itself, less so the trappings placed around it. Mr. Haas is an energetic conductor who believes in what he is doing and knows how to do it. Thomas Beecham liked to say that successful conducting was the ability to hire good musicians, and Mr. Haas has assembled a first-rate band of young people numbering about 50.

Given the four-story-high open space of the Angel Orensanz Center, a former synagogue on the Lower East Side, the resonating sound was unusually handsome. From the seats at the front at least, there was little if any distortion from echo, but this also had to do with confident, well-rehearsed performances. The evening's centerpiece was Cop-

Traces

Angel Orensanz Center

land's "Appalachian Spring." This is not easy music to do well.

"Traces" is an uninterrupted hour and a half that visits repertory from Monteverdi to Gorecki with stops at the music of Corelli, Hindemith, Arvo Pärt, Gluck and some others. It is bound together with interludes composed by Judd Greenstein. These serve as mood changers and scene setters. Some are pleasant and do their work well; some come uncomfortably close to New Age and easy listening. Bells ring from time to time.

Very agreeable were Romain Erkiletlian's video projections on the Orensanz's delightfully crumbling interior walls — mottled, dappled lighting textures with a starry night for the ceiling. Antiphonal effects by instrumentalists and a small chorus from the back and sides were the theatrical effects that worked best. Others had a hard-sell, occasionally blatant quality, in particular a procession of singers and players around the audience reminiscent of an all-too-precious High Church Christmas pageant.

A large, quiet and attentive audience — sprinkled with older donors, but mostly young people — gave "Traces" every benefit of the doubt and seemed happy at the outcome. The continuous format was essential, but every so often the ear and the mind needed a little silence. But good luck to Sympho. Its salesmanship will be refined. It deserves to prosper.