

# Score for harp, oscillograph

By JOE SACK

## CONCERTO FOR SOLO HARP AND ELECTRONICS

I WAS privileged last week to hear the private premiere of a new art form a concerto for solo harp and electronic score played on a stereophonic tape recorder.

No musical gimmick, the work was written for Nicanor Zabaletta, the world's leading concert harpist, by Joseph Tal, the Israeli composer who enjoys a world-wide reputation for his chamber music and orchestral works.

### Cadenzas

The new work marks Tal's first excursion into this field, and is also the first combination of one of music's oldest instruments with avant-garde music produced in a 1971 sound laboratory. It was completed by the composer in January and dedicated to Zabaletta.

I found it a fascinating experiment as I followed the integration and alternation of conventional chromatic harp writing with synthetic electronic sounds which varied from the effect of hissing steam to the percussion of gongs, from high-pitched whistling to low reverberations.

The harp part is written with

ordinary music notation and includes some effective solo cadenzas, while the electronic part of the duo concertante is in the form of line upon line of oscillographic squiggles, which are the exact equivalents on paper of the abstract sounds produced in an electronic laboratory.

For a large part of this 14-minute concert work, the electronic music follows two separate polyphonic lines, sometimes blending with each other and at others suggesting, powerful counterpoint in both solo electronic passages and others where the electronics take a back place and the harp comes to the fore.

Far from vague in its outlines, it appeared to me to be cast in quite a classical sonata-form mould.

"I think this is an exciting work," said Zabaletta. "It is extremely well-written for the harp. I shall study it throughout my South African tour in preparation for a world premiere in either Europe or America.

"This will, of course, in no way change my attitude to the older harp music which is the mainstay of most of my concerts.

"I have, in fact, just recently recorded a new series of long-playing records of 17th and 19th century harp music."

Mr. Zabaletta, who is visiting South Africa for the third time under Musica Viva auspices, will give his Johannesburg recital in the Civic Theatre on Sunday night, May 16, after touring the rest of the country.

To spend more time at his San Sebastian home with his wife and two children, a boy of 17 and a girl of 14, the 64-year-old harpist now in his 40th year of harp recitals has cut down his schedule of international tours from 100 concerts a year to 60.

HOW MAIL

## Nicanor Zabaleta Queen Elizabeth Hall

### Richard Maylan

Nicanor Zabaleta has a lot in common with Segovia. Besides both coming from Spain, both are the acknowledged masters of their instruments, and have reached their positions by playing of classical simplicity and directness which has stimulated composers and other performers alike. So, as with Segovia's annual visit a few weeks ago, Zabaleta's harp recital last night was something of an event, quite typical in the range of music it embraced.

In his opening pieces by Bach and Corelli there were one or two minor slips and indistinct spots. Thereafter he was completely in control and we witnessed several times that magic metamorphosis when an artist momentarily turns even the most trivial tinsel into something

wonderful. What could be more trite than the finale of Viotti's B flat sonata, or the Leyenda of Lopez-Chavarri? Yet they seemed little gems. And in the more substantial matter of Hindemith's Sonata he concentrated our attention solely on the music, on the suspense of the first movement and the grave canons of the last, so that one noted the distinction of his playing only afterwards.

He introduced two pieces new to England. Joseph Tal's Concerto for Harp and Electronics started well, a fascinating game of aural tease between the live harp and taped mutations of harp sounds, but it grew aimless with mere note-spinning in the solo part. The Partita in C of Salvador Bacarisse was, as the programme note said, in the Neo Classical Style, and knew when to stop. More interesting were the Debussy-ish Two Pieces by Marcel Tournier, done with breathtaking delicacy, and C. Salzedo's Two Preludes, both inventive and evocative.