

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 1986

Music: Oppens at the Piano

THE pianist Ursula Oppens chose an unusually varied program for her Monday night recital at Town Hall — Bach's Partita No. 5, Schoenberg's Suite (Op. 25), two works by Liszt, "La Valse" by Ravel, miniatures in tango style by William Bolcom, Michael Sahl, David Jaggard, Lukas Foss and Conlon Nancarrow, and a substantial recent work for piano solo, "The Blue Bamboula" by Charles Wuorinen.

The Bach work was graceful, accomplished and clear, gently stepping rather than fiercely propulsive. Ms. Oppens played the five tangos with humor, if without the final irresistible sense of the dance one might have liked. To this taste, "La Valse" does

not really work very well in its arrangement for solo piano — it always sounds like a reduction — and Ms. Oppens seemed to run out of steam toward the end of the work.

Schoenberg's suite is not a personal favorite — combining as it does the constraints of the 12-tone row with the constraints of Neo-Classicism to create a rigid and rather dogmatic totality. That said, Ms. Oppens's performance was probably the finest this listener has ever heard — chiming and clangorous, involving heart as well as head. Best of all was Mr. Wuorinen's work — a wonderfully clever, fiendishly difficult romp, reckless and carefully controlled at the same time, dispatched with aplomb by Ms. Oppens. **TIM PAGE**