

Festival With a Boom And a Beat of Its Own

By PAUL GRIFFITHS

The Sonic Boom festival, which opened at the Miller Theater on Sunday afternoon, is to continue until Nov. 20, with a concert every two or three days, a good rhythm for programs of new music. Among the composers to be represented by recent works are Milton Babbitt, Mel Powell, Bernard Rands and Martin Bresnick; one whole concert, on Nov. 15, will be devoted to the music of the late Conlon Nancarrow; and another, two days earlier, will offer music-theater pieces by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Frederic Rzewski and Peter Maxwell Davies. The outlook is promising.

Or at least, the worst is probably over, since Sunday's "sampler gala" at the Miller, Broadway at 116th Street, was a disappointment. The program got off to a bad start with Carl Vine's "Café Concertino," which was played here not long ago and does not improve on further acquaintance. This is music aspiring to the condition of puppyhood: juvenile, eager to please, furiously wagging its tail. Its jokeyness was resumed fortissimo at the end of the concert in Jon Deak's "Lady Chatterley's Dream," scored for an ensemble that could have been playing the "Trout" Quintet but was instead alternating between snappy and lush moods while shouting out, in disconnected words, fragments of dialogue from the D. H. Lawrence novel.

Of course, there is a place for humor in contemporary music: that case was made decisively by Haleh Abghari's virtuoso and winning performance of some of Georges Aperghis's "Recitations" for solo voice. Each little piece was built from a small repertory of nonsense vocables — grunts, squeaks and mutterings — and each became, in Ms. Abghari's delivery, a sharp and funny image of stereotypical behavior.

There was humor, too, and again virtuosity, in a brilliant performance



Chris Lee for The New York Times

Haleh Abghari in "Recitations."

by Speculum Musicae of a classic Charles Wuorinen piece, his "Arabia Felix." Music here becomes a rush of color and madness, ending on a high point of peril with a fast unison melody. One hopes for more such pieces as Sonic Boom reverberates, and more such performances.