

A Concert Protest?

By Judith Martin

A third of the members of the Philadelphia Orchestra, scheduled to give the inaugural concert on Jan. 19, met yesterday to discuss a protest action against the war in Vietnam.

"Many of us feel the concert is a de facto political situation," said Wilfred Batchelder, a string bass player who collected 52 signatures from among the 106 playing members on a petition to discuss protest action. The 35 who attended the meeting agreed to circulate a petition condemning recent bombings in North Vietnam and "such genocidal actions at any time in the future."

"We're being asked to

play the 1812 Overture, with booming sounds like simulated bombs, while B-52s are dropping bombs with our taxpayers' money," he said. "We feel we're being asked to be 'good Germans.' We remember the pictures of Wilhelm Furtwangler conducting the Berlin Philharmonic while Adolf Hitler sat in the front row."

The musicians had received a telegram Tuesday from the Philadelphia Area Religious, Peace and Community Organizations urging them not to play the concert because "culture and mass murder are not compatible."

On Wednesday, Leonard Bernstein announced that he would conduct a free "Concert as a Plea for Peace" in the Washington Cathedral at the same time as the inaugural concert. He plans to lead Washington musicians in Haydn's "Mass in Time of War." The Cathedral's dean, Francis B. Sayre Jr., and former Sen. Eugene McCarthy also will participate.

But Irv Segall, a violist involved in the protest discussions, said there was no question of their not playing. "After all, this is show

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business, and that's the way we were brought up," he said.

Louis Hood, a spokesman for the Philadelphia Orchestra Association, said that not playing would be "a gross violation of the contract," although he could not say what action the board might take in such a case.

The association, which also received telegrams from the peace coalition representing most of the major peace and religious groups in Philadelphia, issued a statement yesterday that "music is truly a nonpolitical art, devoted to no political causes or factions, and it is felt by Mr. (Eugene) Ormandy and the orchestra Association that this concert will be a fitting salute to the ongoing democratic process which perpetuates the undisputed rule of the majority in this country."

Protesting members of the orchestra plan to meet again Monday. Batchelder said he expected the main topic to be a protest to the orchestra association for expressing, in press releases, the delight of the orchestra at being asked to play.

"No one asked our opinion about that," he said.