

Dutoit, Weissenberg deliver the real thing

By Avigdor Zaromp special writer

One aspect of our civilization is the prevalence of substitutes and artificial limitations for the real thing. Music is no exception.

In both the art of music writing as well as music performance one may encounter these artificial ingredients all too frequently. There are, of course, notable exceptions to whom the preceding characterization doesn't apply.

Among the most distinguished in this category is Maestro Charles Dutoit, the present conductor of the Montreal Symphony. Another gifted artist in this category is pianist Alexis Weissenberg, whose demand

by major orchestras and conductors is among the highest.

Comprising the latest Detroit Symphony Orchestra program featuring these distinguished guests with one that is merely routine would be like comparing pure Colombian coffee to a decaffeinated brand. The items on the program were all familiar ones — the Overture to "Beatrice and Benedict" by Berlioz, Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor and "The Rite of Spring" by Stravinsky.

While the material was old-fashioned, the freshness of the aroma tended to rekindle one's appreciation for these works, which are often taken for granted.

Even the Berlioz short overture



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made a significant impact, emphasizing this composer's keen ability of orchestration. The Chopin concerto presented a rare display of artistic treasure. It could be compared to a gem, delicate and fragile, yet full of substance.

When examining such a precious gem under a microscope, the detection of some flaws is inevitable. Likewise, Weissenberg's playing had

some imperfections manifested by some occasional missed notes, but these were of the kind that are noticed only by hardcore critics.

The well shaped and delicate phrases flowed with rich, fruitful abundance. There was an extremely tender expressiveness in the slow movement on one hand, and a dazzling display of technique in the coda to the final movement on the other.

All this was supplemented by fine orchestral support. Chapin was notorious for being a mediocre orchestrator and frequently it is my feeling that one could dispense with the orchestra in this particular work without much damage. This, however, was not the case with this performance.

"The Rite of Spring," in spite of the popularity it has gained since its writing more than seven decades ago, is still not fully understood by many. Its portrayal of primitive dances makes it sound more contemporary than some works written just recently.

However, the intricate rhythmic patterns and ingenious instrumental combinations turn it into a most challenging work — and a most rewarding listening experience when properly executed.


Dutoit appeared to be intimately familiar with this intricate score. His knowledge of the exact entrance of each instrument together with the appropriate sound texture made this work into more than a sequence of

sounds. The DSO musicians, who have performed the work endless times and recorded it under Dutoit are, of course, familiar with it themselves.

Under Dutoit the sound was unified and integrated, making the listener feel the full impact of this difficult work. This isn't meant to suggest that this latest performance was superior to that under Dutoit — as a rule I try to stay away from such comparisons.

To return to our coffee analogy, there are several different superior brands with different tastes. Only the decaffeinated brands seem to have the same bland taste. Hopefully, we shall be treated to many more refills with Maestro Charles Dutoit.

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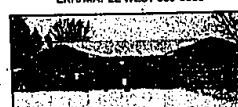
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