

At Meadow Brook

New artistic director plans some surprises

By DONNA OLENDORF

Although Neville Marriner's job as artistic director of the Meadow Brook Music Festival doesn't officially begin until next summer, the British conductor is already contemplating changes.

For one thing, he wants to get away from the term "music" festival. "This is not just a festival of classical music," he asserted in his clipped British accent. "It's intended to be a more liberal festival of the arts."

For another, he wants to expand the program to include more kinds of music, more ballet, drama—perhaps even films.

"What we don't want," he said, "is a rerun of the subscription concerts in Detroit. We'll come up with a program of our own, using the particular works and artists we want to employ."

"We might have chamber music in smaller groups with players from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in individual roles. I have a sneaking suspicion we might include drama. I'd also like to have cinema. There are many films, for instance, about music or theatre or ballet that would never make Detroit on a general release. They are for a very limited audience. Many of them are tucked away in archives and would never be shown on television. I would like to have access to some of these."

In addition to these offerings, which have limited appeal, Marriner would like to include "a modest film festival—which would have a broader appeal."

"THE FESTIVAL SHOULD OFFER something to everybody—I think that's the beauty of it. The marvelous thing about going to a city like Salzburg that has a festival going for it is to see how the whole town gets involved," said Marriner, who hopes to kindle a similar enthusiasm here.

One of the ways he will encourage community involvement is by the example he sets.

"I think the artistic director's job is to identify himself with his own festival," said Marriner, who will conduct several of the concerts next year.

"I will certainly do the opening concert."

Cox reunion continues tradition

The Cox family annual reunion was hosted this summer by Mr. and Mrs. Harold W. Cox in their Fendit Avenue home in Farmington Hills.

The group of about 50 are the offspring of Mr. and Mrs. John G. Cox who came from Somersetshire, England, in 1860 and lived on Thirteen Mile, near Drake, until their deaths in 1904 and 1907.

Decendants have met once a year, since 1920. Only occasional get-togethers were held before then; one of which was the celebration of the John Cox's 50th wedding anniversary in 1903.

A gift to the families that attended the reunion this year came from Kay Briggs, a member of Farmington Historical Society, and daughter of Minnie Cox. Her gift was a 31-page booklet called "Our History." One of the pages was a reprint of a clipping from the Farmington Enterprise, dated Aug. 18, 1901, telling of a four-generation reunion of the Cox family.

certs with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and perhaps there will be another orchestra at the end of the festival which I will also conduct."

On the other hand, Marriner said, "It is also important that people have as much variety as possible."

He hopes to feature a variety of top-notch artists, including the New York Philharmonic if luck holds.

"It's a matter of economics with a festival like this," he maintained. "You have to ask yourself, 'Who can we afford?'"

The fact is, that in spite of the festival's burgeoning popularity (subscription sales have increased fourfold since 1974), Meadow Brook isn't making a profit.

"THE ECONOMICS OF MUSIC these days are incredibly precarious. Meadow Brook might show a profit sometime if we lowered our standards, but not if we maintain the quality of the programs we have now."

"If you want to have a break even point economically, then you put on popular things which are cheap, like a solo pop artist."

He compared the cost of one such artist to the cost of a symphony plus a soloist and conductor, adding, "You see why art festivals operate in the red."

Does this ruffle the new artistic director? Not at all.

"A successful festival is considered to be one that continues," he said, pointing out that Meadow Brook is the third oldest in the country.

"It's been going on for 16 years now."

Although Meadow Brook is Marriner's most recent appointment, it is by no means the only responsibility he holds.

"I have to make records," he said. He recently signed a 10-year contract with Philips and Deutsche Grammophon calling for 30 discs in the next decade. He is also musical director of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra.

In addition he works with the Stuttgart Radio orchestra in Germany, holds an appointment in Paris, and guest conducts for two-and-a-half months to boot.

"Generally speaking, I expect to work about 54 weeks a year," said the energetic Englishman who admits that he loves his job.

"Let's face it—the whole business of being a musician is very pleasant. It's a very fulfilling occupation, I think."

Marriner, now considered the most recorded conductor in history, came to his profession almost by accident. He started out as a violin player on the symphony orchestra circuit. When he organized his own chamber group in London, he would direct from the concertmaster's chair.

"After a while we started recording rather more complicated repertoires which couldn't direct sitting down. So I began to stand up," he recalled.

One day he was spotted by Pierre Monteux, principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, who admonished him to "stand up and conduct properly."

Under this maestro's tutelage, he learned to do just that, and, once he started conducting in earnest, he was hooked.

"It's what every musician wants," he said, "as a conductor you have the ultimate responsibility for the total performance."

"When you are performing you are unaware of either the individuality of the orchestral players or the fact that the audience is present. It is as if you were playing the piano. You are actually playing the piece yourself

even though you are using individual people to do it for you. All your concentration lies in achieving the balanced performance that you had imagined when you were learning the piece."

"The way I want the piece to sound may not be the way that anybody else wants it to sound. Therefore, I may be

delivering an entirely idiosyncratic performance. So I'm always open to criticism. But it's not good just having opinions. If you are a conductor, you have to have a conviction about the music and that conviction must be pretty unshakable."

He said that without conviction the

conductor is weak and the music will reflect that weakness. What starts as a conviction when you're 30 can be seen from a distance of 20 years later as an imposture in a way, he explained.

"But you have to be convinced that that's the only way to do it."

Because Marriner has enough faith in his own abilities to believe in the

music he creates, his worries are of a different nature.

"Your big anxiety is that you're going to die before you've done it all. And you are. I mean no one is able to cope with all the music that's been written. An you have to make sure you get your priorities right—so you perform the pieces you really want to perform."



Neville Marriner gained conducting experience when he and 15 fellow musicians formed an ensemble, "The Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields." It later became highly acclaimed and he conducted from his first chair violin position.

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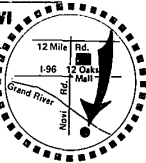


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