Staples brings out the gem quality

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

review

Last week marked Sixten Ehrling's second and last program with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra this season.

When the concert was about to start, things were not quite the same. Ordinarily, concertmaster Gordon Staples would step in and direct the musicians in the final tuning of their instruments before the conductor makes his appearance. This is one of the visible duties of the concertmaster.

This night assistant concertmaster, Joseph Goldman, performed this duty. The initial tendency in a situation like this is to wonder about the cause of absence of the familiar figure. But on this occasion there was a very good reason for that.

Staples had a different role that evening — that of a solo violinist in the infrequently played Violin Concerto by Samuel Barber. The opening and closing works on the program were much more familiar — the Symphony No. 88 by Haydn and the Symphony No. 7 by Dvorak.

AMONG HAYDN'S 104 symphonies, only a small portion are part of the standard repertoire and No. 88 ranks among the most popular of these. This performance by a reduced orchestra was marked by its zesty and vigorous approach.

In spite of the reduced size, there was a full orchestral sound, an approach that might not elicit universal agreement. I found at least three quarters of the work well within acceptable bounds.

While Ehrling's approach differs from that of Dorati, who is considered by many to be possibly the foremost expert on Haydn alive, this was a valid approach, which was rewarding in its vigorous enthusiam.

The one exception was the second, slow movement, which sounded too heavy handed and lacked some refinement in some of the subtle phrases. But following the sweeping, captivating final movement, such flaws would be forgotten by a listener, if he doesn't happen to be a critic.

The Barber Violin Concerto is a modern, musical jewel, that tends to be neglected. It can restore one's faith in contemporary American music which, admittedly, I hold in a rather low esteem most of the time.

Staples rose to the occasion by providing artistic insight and excellent tone quality to the masterful strains of this composition.

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