

Cottler does his best to dispell old age myths

By Avigdor Zarembo
Special writer

The Detroit Symphony's guests last week were two distinguished Russian-born talents. They presented us with another sample of their country's rich musical heritage. Both of them have chosen our country as their homeland.

Guest conductor was Maxim Shostakovich, who made his debut with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra last season, when he presented an entire program consisting of works by his celebrated father, Dmitri Shostakovich.

THIS TIME, OTHER composers also were featured. The only non-Russian composition was the Second Piano Concerto, in F Minor, by Chopin.

The pianist in the Chopin Concerto was Mischa Kottler, who has been a prominent talent in the Detroit community for many years. His performance underscored the fact that musical ability can transcend age barriers, as well as international boundaries.

Kottler, who has reached his 80th birthday, provides one of the strongest cases against those who have the misguided notion that one should retire after reaching a certain age.

HIS PERFORMANCE of the Chopin concerto was not just an adequate performance for an 80-year-old. It was a profound statement and testament for all ages. Kottler's playing was characterized by both brilliancy and deep, reflective insight.

He had a complete technical command most of the time, even though there were some isolated flawed notes, the most serious occasion being in the third movement, before the coda.

This, however, is preferable to a flawless performance without a profound musical approach, which this concerto requires. One can very seldom

review

hear the second movement with a comparable sense of beauty.

THE ONE WEAK point in this composition is Chopin's own definition of orchestration. While some performances provide a better cover-up of this deficiency than this one, there is no way to redeem it completely, as far as the orchestral aspect is concerned.

It is best appreciated for what it is — a magnificent composition highlighting the piano, the only important instrument in Chopin's works.

Following a rousing, standing ovation, Kottler obliged by playing as an encore a Rachmaninoff arrangement of a theme by Kreisler.

Maestro Shostakovich wasn't outdone when it was his turn to shine. He opened the program with the Prelude to Klavnschikha by Mussorgsky, a short piece which brought forth the tender, reflective side of this composer.

THE CONCLUDING WORK on the program was the Symphony No. 1 by Shostakovich, which was the most extensive orchestral work on the program. The first of the 15 symphonies by the composer, it is a profound and mature piece, composed when he was only 18.

Maestro Shostakovich captured superbly the many contradictory moods of that composition. Like several of the composer's other works, it combines playful and satirical elements with tender, expressive and melancholic themes, as well as some gushing and turbulent segments.

THE PIANO, used as a non-solo in-

strument, has a prominent role in the second allegro movement, which has the form of a scherzo.

The coda in the last movement is preceded by an unusual trumpet solo. The energetic and spirited performance of this work deserves the highest acclaim.

To be sure, not everybody is in complete agreement as to the ability of Maestro Shostakovich as a conductor. Some musicians criticize his baton technique, and I am not sufficiently competent to judge on that matter. But those who feel that he is merely an exponent of his father's music are seriously underestimating him.

While so far this was the major ingredient of his programs here, there is no doubt in my mind that his talent is much more universal.

ANYBODY WHO CAN present so impressively the Shostakovich compositions we've heard so far, no matter what baton technique he uses, should do well with almost any major composer.

This week there will be a chance to prove this assertion, when Maestro Shostakovich will conduct works by Debussy, Franck (Symphonic Variations) and Berlioz (Symphonie Fantastique). Hopefully, those who had reservations about his ability will be eating their own words. As for me, I am a very busy eater.

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