

Oratorio portrays human drama

By Avigdor Zarembo
special writer

Some say that the best things in life are free.

That might be an oversimplification, but sometimes some good rewards are available that are free, at least to the public.

One such event was the recent performance of Mendelssohn's oratorio "Elijah" at Temple Beth El. The impressive structure, located at 14 Mile and Telegraph in Bloomfield Township was indeed a suitable choice.

Designed by architect Minoru Yamasaki in the shape of an elongated pyramid, it has some interesting acoustical features, as well as enough room to accommodate a sizeable congregation.

The large seating capacity, as well as the ample parking space, however, didn't turn out to be sufficient for the occasion. Even with double-parking, a lot of visitors were hard pressed and had to look for parking elsewhere and

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seating overflowed into the outside corridor.

While the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) season ended a few weeks ago, the orchestra members aren't about to call it quits and take it easy. This was one of several events enhanced by the outstanding talents of members of the DSO.

IN ADDITION, there were the Kenneth Jewell Choral and the Chancel Choir of the Bushnell Congregational Church.

The role of Elijah was sung by bass-baritone William Warfield. Other solo singers included soprano, Faye Washington, mezzo soprano, Rosemarie Murch, and tenor, Christopher Broderick. The conductor was Ray Ferguson.

This event, a joint venture of Temple Beth El and Bushnell Congregational Church, was an impressive example of interdenominational cooperation. It would be tempting to say that the character of Elijah could serve as a symbol of such cooperation and tolerance, except that it could be argued that Elijah himself had his own share of intolerance when he ordered the prophets of Baal to be destroyed.

But nobody can deny the profound nature of Mendelssohn's oratorio. While being bound by the biblical text, it does magnificently portray an intense human drama. The emotions were very aptly presented in this performance.

There were some drawbacks in the voice of William Warfield (Elijah), which was occasionally wobbly and had too much vibrato which tended to obscure the melody. But it was beaming with strength on other occasions.

THE CHORUSES were impressive

with their unified impact and the other solo singers were also equal to the task.

Due to the length of the composition, some cuts were inevitable. But most regrettable was the omission of the ascent of Elijah in the fiery chariot, which contains one of the most powerful musical descriptions of such an outlandish event.

It is remarkable how a musical setting can transform and transcend the meaning and significance of a biblical story. One might doubt whether the events, as depicted, are historically accurate.

But in the musical context this is irrelevant. Mendelssohn's oratorio is real. Through it, the character of Elijah becomes as real as any current event that affects our lives. Perhaps even more so.

Hopefully, the Bushnell Performing Arts Series will provide us with many more rewarding events for years to come.

Thursday, May 26, 1983 O&E (B)11C



International theater

The internationally acclaimed drama "The Wall" will be presented by members of the University Theatre Center Kalamazoo from Warsaw, Poland, during the International Theatre Olympiad '83. The group will appear Monday, June 27, at the Livonia-Redford Theatre Guild in Redford. Thirty groups will perform during the Olympiad, Friday, June 24, to Monday, July 4, in Metro Detroit and Windsor.

Mozart vs. Salieri — simply no contest

By Avigdor Zarembo
special writer

The rivalry between Mozart and Salieri is now two centuries old. Much has been said about it. A recent interest in that feud has been rekindled by the celebrated stage play on the subject, "Amadeus."

Last Friday a special program of works by Mozart and Salieri was presented by Renaissance Concerts at Orchestra Hall.

Did Salieri truly poison Mozart? Most musicologists doubt it. But the subject proves to be fascinating. Compositions by Salieri haven't been regularly performed since his death.

While some might attribute this to his being a prime, post-mortem suspect in Mozart's murder, a more plausible

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explanation is that he was a mediocre composer.

There are, of course, some lesser composers who are being played, but then, there are some better ones who aren't either. Who said that history is completely fair?

In the current "duels," few had any doubt about the outcome. The only question was by how much Mozart would end up ahead. As it turned out, there was really no contest.

THE ORCHESTRA Hall program opened with Mozart's serenade "Eine

Kleine Nachtmusik." For Mozart, this was one of his less serious works.

But Salieri's two works, a contrabasso and Concertino da Camera for Oboe and Strings, didn't even come close.

The contrabasso has a very pompous ending, almost like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, but with little content to show for it.

The concertino demonstrated stylistic skill and aptitude, but very little imaginative inspiration on the part of the composer. This, however, doesn't diminish the magnificent performance of principal Detroit Symphony Orchestra oboe player Donald Baker, who made the work sound more profound than it really is.

He also performed Mozart's Oboe

Concerto in the second part of the program. As fate would have it, Baker's instrument was temporarily out of commission due to a passing accident in which a cloth was lodged inside and couldn't be retrieved.

Consequently, he had to borrow one from John Snow, who in turn had to borrow yet another instrument. All this, however, didn't put a dent in his skill, except for a brief stumbling on one occasion in the third movement of Mozart's concerto.

The Renaissance City Chamber Orchestra demonstrated a cohesive and unified sound on this occasion. Even Mozart's short contrabasso sounded symphonic in character.

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