

Bernstein savors fanfare and Vienna Philharmonic

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Listening to Leonard Bernstein rehearse the Vienna Philharmonic in the University of Michigan's Hill Auditorium, I remembered the last time I had heard musicians play at mid-day in street clothes. It was a fall day in 1932, and after playing the closing bars of Haydn's "Farewell" Symphony, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra walked out on strike.

"The Vienna Philharmonic is the world's only orchestral collective," according to its publicity. Unlike the DSO, the VP wouldn't be hitting the bricks.

Also unlike the DSO, which has a number of women members, and unlike the suburban Plymouth and Oakway symphonies, where 80 percent of the violinists are women, the Vienna Philharmonic has no women members — and isn't likely to.

Clearly, there are two sides to this business of running an orchestra democratically.



Leonard Bernstein, as portrayed on his Columbia recording of the Schumann Symphony No. 4 with the New York Philharmonic.

BERNSTEIN MUGGED hilariously when I asked him, during the news conference later, why there were no women members. He pointed to the stolid gentleman standing next to him, as if to pass the buck.

The stolid gentleman turned out to be Professor Alfred Altenburger, a member of the violin section and the orchestra's president. He muttered a bit in German, then answered in English:

"Tradition — 150 years. And we didn't want to change it."

There was another reason, Bernstein explained. The VP also is the local opera orchestra in Vienna. Some days the members show up in their tuxes for a 3-4 p.m. symphonic rehearsal with him. Then they must grab a bite to eat, race across town, park, and be in the opera house pit by 7 p.m. A woman, they explained, wouldn't have time to get home to prepare dinner for her family.

"It's not that women are weaker," said Bernstein. He added, "I understand Berlin finally broke down and hired two women. One is leaving."

There was a third reason: The orchestra selects its own new members.

"A jury from the members decides," Altenburger said. "Everything is decided by committees of the members themselves. The men themselves decide."

UNLIKE AN American conductor who has much to say about who joins the orchestra, Vienna has a different "management style." According to the VP's publicity:

"All the administrative tasks — from

DEMOCRACY extends into performance, too.

When the orchestra rehearsed the Brahms' Symphony No. 2, I noticed the perfect unity of the violinists' bowing — all used exactly the same part of the bow, down to the inch, for each note — and gave the identical emphasis. At the break, I asked Bernstein who worked out the bowings.

"I worked out the bowings," he said. "If they don't like it, we discuss it. They may say, 'We're used to doing it this way.' Bernstein shrugged, as if to say they work out their differences."

"It's no inner precision — a precision of intention. Not just — umph!" he said, indicating a half-bow down stroke.

Many remarked at the rapport which the Massachusetts-born Bernstein had with this Viennese orchestra. With the New York Philharmonic (of which he is conductor laureate) and the orchestras of Israel, Boston and London, it ranks among his favorites in the world.

"They almost know what I mean before I do it," he smiled.

REHEARSING the final movement of the Haydn Symphony No. 8, Bernstein jammed his hands and the baton in his pockets and let the orchestra play on its own, only signalling an emphasis with a nod of the head and a *diminuendo* with a crouch. The news corps applauded at the closing chord.

"I made the ultimate demand a conductor can put on an orchestra," Bernstein explained. "They really listen to each other. And this is a strange hall — a shallow stage, no depth and a lot of width."

A reviewer noted Bernstein and the VP, who began their American tour in Ann Arbor, were sticking to the center of the repertoire (late 18th through 19th centuries), though Bernstein had championed the moderns as conductor of the New York Philharmonic. Why?

"Because that's what they play marvelously," he answered. "If I were touring with the Philharmonic, I would play differently; 50 percent of what we played (with New York) was 20th century music."

HE RECALLED the time in Vienna the members asked to play one of his works — "Kaddish," a symphony. "This orchestra is not famous for loving modern music or taking easily to it," he said.

Although rehearsal time was short, the musicians insisted he explain the Jewish rite he referred to. Bernstein explained it was the equivalent of the "Sanctus" in the Catholic mass, the rite was similar to the blessing of the wine, and the term wasn't really Hebrew but Aramaic, the language Christ spoke.

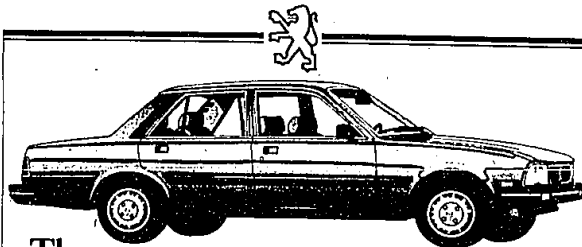
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Truckers on Oakland County roads are required to observe spring load weight restrictions through mid-March, the Road Commission announced.

Unseasonably warm weather is causing frost to leave the ground earlier than usual this year, said William Fog-

niel, deputy managing director of the Oakland County Road Commission.

The load restrictions are necessary to protect road pavements which are not supported as well during frost-out as they are before and afterwards.

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