

Herbig demonstrates sense of showmanship

By Avigdor Zaromp
staff writer

The term "superstar" is most commonly associated with rock and popular music. It is seldom used in the classical music vocabulary. One often wonders whether classical music, the way we know it, is not a vanishing breed.

Happily, once in a long while, there is an event that inspires our confidence in the future of classical music.

One of these took place on Tuesday, Sept. 11, with the special gala opening of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra season. The concert, not part of the regular subscription series, had been sold out several weeks in advance, with a long waiting list of those less fortunate.

The featured superstar was Israeli born violinist, Itzhak Perlman, who performed the violin concerto by Tchaikovsky.

This was also the first appearance of Maestro Gunther Herbig as the official music director of the DSO, even though the qualifier "designate" has been occasionally omitted in previous references.

THE SELECTIONS consisted of the New England Triptych by the contemporary American composer William Schuman and music from three of Wagner's operas.

While the name of Perlman in itself is enough to virtually guarantee a sell-out event, his music proves that this attraction of large crowds is well justified and goes beyond the name of the performer.

It is true that his selections have a proven track record. Two years earlier he performed the Brahms concerto here on a similar occasion. But his performance presents these popular selections in a way that is fresh and evocative, without resorting to artificial demonstrations of eccentricity.



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A persistent problem involving performances for orchestra and solo instrument is that of spontaneous rhythmic variation. If such a variation is too capricious, there is a falling apart between soloist and orchestra.

The other extreme is a version that is overly predictable. This performance had the right balance between the two extremes.

While some of the rhythmic shifts resulted in a delayed orchestral response, it was never more than a couple of beats and in tolerable range. The resulting imaginative phrases were well

worth the small compromise.

In some instances, more attention was given to segments taken for granted. A case in point is the ornamented variation of the main theme of the first movement, at the end of the development. This was played at a slower tempo than usual, obviously not due to lack of technique.

The second movement created a feeling of outpouring and sentiment, but without undue prolongations. The final movement was presented with its shiny glitter. Perlman performed it with the customary out, which avoid some overly repetitive phrases.

MAESTRO Herbig demonstrated his inspiring ability in the orchestral selections. The opening Schuman selection featured balanced sound and measured pace. While one could argue that the approach was overly romantic, there was less harshness of sound and the symphonic dimensions unfolded in a more apparent way.

The percussions at the end of the "Crueler" episode went hand in hand with the rest of the orchestra and didn't completely dominate as with many other versions.

In the Wagner selections, Herbig was in full command of the enormous orchestral forces. In the prelude to "Die Meistersinger," the outline remained clear and well defined even during the most complex convergence of the multiple themes.

The music from "Tristan und Isolde" was descriptive yet well focused, rather than a feeble, sleep inducing attempt at atonality.

In the Overture to "Tannhauser," Herbig demonstrated some showmanship when he conducted simultaneously two different rhythms when the main themes converged towards the end.

There is no denying that Perlman is unique. But we can't expect to have him on a weekly basis (that's one of the things that make him unique). However, with such a capable orchestra and music director, we should have our own resources to generate large crowds in time. This might be wishful thinking, but all we need is enough people to share this wish.

Maestro Herbig demonstrated his inspiring ability in the orchestral selections.

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