

Russian cellist shows outstanding skill

The latest Detroit Symphony program had some unique characteristics. One of the most noteworthy was the fact that every element on the program was either a first or a second.

The works on the program consisted of the tone poem "Richard III" by Smetana (first performance by the DSO), the first cello concerto Op. 107 by Shostakovich (second performance) and the Symphony No. 5 by Dvorak (first performance).

The first-second concert applies to the visiting artists as well. Guest conductor was the young Czech Maestro,

Jiri Belohlavek, who made his debut here with this appearance, and the soloist was the young Russian cellist, David Geringas, marking his second appearance with the DSO.

One who is accustomed to Cold War terminology would also tend to see the Eastern Bloc as the common denominator of both guest artists and the works performed. This characterization is, of course, less accurate.

For one thing, Smetana and Dvorak lived long before the concept of the "Eastern Bloc" came into being, and musicians of consequence tend to reach

beyond a rigid political ideology. This last observation is especially significant in the case of Shostakovich, who had to struggle most of his life to reconcile the ideological demands of the authorities in his country and his own artistic needs.

MASTERS Belohlavek, who at the age of 38 is considered extremely young by conductors' standards, has an impressive track record. However, not all of the works on the program proved to be suitable vehicles for his talent.

The works by Smetana and Dvorak offered a convincing argument for their obscurity. The "Richard III" tone poem contains a lot of noisy passages that supposedly portray the twisted personality of this Shakespearean char-

acter, but one is hard put to find much substance beyond the noise.

As one of the musicians aptly quipped, "This is a perfect Thankgiving selection — this Smetana piece is a real turkey."

The Dvorak Symphony, however, has more redeeming features than this performance suggested. Granted it isn't an outstanding symphonic masterpiece. However, if this work is to be performed at all, it should be treated as if it were a masterpiece, to present it in the best possible light.

This performance gave the impression that there was no concerted effort to penetrate beyond the basic notes and harmonies. There was no continuity in the development of the themes and in



Avigdor Zoromp

the establishment of their relationship with the secondary themes. The one exception was the scherzo, which is reminiscent of Dvorak's "Slavonic Dances" and therefore provided some familiar ground.

THE HIGH point of the evening was achieved with the Shostakovich concerto. Geringas demonstrated not only excellent technique, but his performing style was also impressive. He dug into the passages in the first movement and presented the basic pattern in it with infinite variety.

The slinging quality of his Gungadgini instrument in the second movement and its extended cadenza was an example of rare lyric purity. In the final, sweeping movement, a string raptured in the middle of the ecstatic enthusiasm.

Fortunately, principal cellist Italo Babin had a spare string on the spot, which Geringas skillfully attached within a minute. Listening to a portion of this movement twice proved to be a blessing.

David Geringas is scheduled to appear with the Renaissance Chamber Players next February. Hopefully, we shall also hear more of Belohlavek in the future. In spite of the aforementioned shortcomings, he seems to be a promising rising star.

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