

# Sweet revenge — Ashkenazy created traffic jam

By Avigdor Zaromp  
special writer

Nobody likes traffic jams, especially when caused by events and conditions that one isn't responsible for creating. The one last Friday night in downtown Detroit wasn't any more pleasant than any other, but at least there was some consolation.

The occasion was a special recital by pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy. While such discomfort is a dubious joy, classical music listeners could feel some pride in creating their own traffic jam — a situation that doesn't happen very often.

Ashkenazy, who has embarked in recent years on a conducting career, is one of the world's most acclaimed pianists. The mention of his name was

reason enough to guarantee a sellout even with many extra seats added on-site.

The evaluation of musical ability isn't scientific and one can't claim that other visiting pianists deserve the smaller audiences they get.

BUT, ASHKENAZY'S performance on this occasion demonstrated that his reputation as a top rank pianist is well deserved.

The program consisted exclusively of works by Rachmaninoff and Chopin, both of whom were prominent pianists themselves. The Rachmaninoff works are especially noted for their great technical difficulty and one seldom has the opportunity to hear them in a live recital. These were the Variations on a Theme by Corelli and six Etude Tableaux from Op. 39.

The Corelli theme (which is actually not originally by Corelli) is transformed into a massive and dramatic masterpiece by Rachmaninoff. Ashkenazy brought out these aspects most convincingly. The heavy chords in the more turbulent variations were played forcefully but without undue flashiness and without compromising the musical integrity. These were contrasted with the more tender variations, with the anti-climactic coda having a spell binding effect.

The Etudes were presented with their diverse characteristics. No. 3 and 3, for example, were played so delicately that they sounded almost impressionistic. The concluding No. 9, in D Major, was played without being harsh.

While many pianists are capable of

generating a lot of noise, few are capable of bringing out Rachmaninoff's saturated harmonies the way Ashkenazy did in this performance.

THE CHOPIN part of the program consisted of the Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Nocturnes No. 4 and 2 from Op. 48, the Impromptu No. 3 in G Flat Major and the Scherzo No. 3 in C Sharp Minor. Ashkenazy's performance of the Chopin works was far more subdued than one is accustomed to. But the artistic coloration of the delicate phrases portrayed rare beauty and depth. To be sure, such approach would have been ideal in a small chamber setting, but in the large Ford Auditorium with its imperfect acoustics there were times that I felt the need for a larger sound. However, Ashkenazy's ability to compress the range of sound intensity into the



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soft range between pianissimo and mezzo-forte is incredible.

The most impressive performance was of the Scherzo No. 3. The carefully outlined themes, sprinkled with the cascading, descending passages, culminated with the brilliant coda, which was played with impressive bravura.

The spontaneous standing ovation was more pronounced than one can

witness during the playing of the National Anthem. Following the long applause, Ashkenazy obliged with the Prelude in G Minor by Rachmaninoff as an encore.

It would be too much to hope for a world without traffic jams. The next best thing, however, would be if these were caused by people of the caliber of Vladimir Ashkenazy.

## DSO offers operatic-classic mix

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special writer

The combination of operatic and classical symphonic repertoires has traditionally been tenuous, with mixed results. Some feel that the place of operatic arias is in the context of a complete opera performance. Others don't have the patience to listen to a complete opera but don't mind hearing a few well sung arias.

Last week's Detroit Symphony Orchestra program offered such a mixture. Guest conductor Ishak Jackson, is best known to Detroit audiences from last season when he led the Classical Roots program. This identification doesn't mean his complete justice.

### review

Without diminishing the value of the Classical Roots series, Jackson's reputation and credentials go far beyond local appeal to minorities. He is well versed and respected by top musical authorities and his ability can inspire an appeal that is universal, as true musicianship should.

Guest singer Sarah Reese also has an impressive track record with her short career, which started in 1981. The proof of the pudding, however, is in the listening and thus impressions from the

present performance are more meaningful than long lists of past achievements.

THE PROGRAM opened with the Suite No. 3 from "Bacchus et Ariane" by Rameau. This impressionistic piece isn't one of the planneries of the repertoire in this category. In my opinion, it is certainly inferior to Ravel's "Daphnis and Chloé," to which it is frequently compared.

However, this performance was successful in emphasizing its more appealing elements. One drawback was in the climactic ending, which sounded disoriented and unbalanced.

This was followed by the vocal selections, spanned over both ends of the in-

termission — Barber's "Knorrville Summer of 1915," Verdi's aria "D'amor Sull'Alba" from "Il Trovatore" and Mozart's aria "Dove Sono" from "The Marriage of Figaro."

While the musical impact of these selections, taken out of context, can't match that of a Beethoven or Brahms concerto, Reese's vocal talents justified the inclusion of these selections. Barber's work was commissioned by soprano Eleanor Sieber with the help of Roussevitchy and the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

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