

Oakway, Kottler excel in Rachmaninoff

By Avigdor Zoramp
special writer

Oakway Symphony Orchestra had a direct Rachmaninoff connection in last Sunday's concert in the form of piano soloist, Mischa Kottler, and this turned out to be the most exciting part of the program.

The orchestra, established in 1973, is one of the capable community ones in our area. Its conductor and director, Francesco Di Biasi, has been in that capacity since the beginning.

This latest program drew a large audience. The major source of the attraction was the distinguished pianist, Mischa Kottler, who appeared as a soloist in the Rachmaninoff Concerto No. 2.

Compared to major orchestras such as the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, community orchestras have their limitations. While these were certainly present on this program, the rewarding moments were even more remarkable. The items on the first part of the program were Beethoven's "Egmont" Overture and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5.

To be sure, I wasn't overly impressed with the performance of the



Mischa Kottler

"Egmont" Overture. Even if allowances are made for the limitations of a community orchestra, the intonation slips were too many to make the listening sufficiently enjoyable.

THE TCHAIKOVSKY SYMPHONY, on the other hand, offered a substantial amount of listening pleasure. I found myself absorbed in

some of the segments, enjoying the music, hardly affected by occasional lapses.

Such was the case in the second movement, with its excellent horn playing. The final movement came across with its heavily orchestral passages impressive, if not always intact. To be able to tackle such a complicated symphonic work and stay together is an enviable achievement.

The best, however, was yet to come. Mischa Kottler is a living legend in this area. Having been here for more than 50 years, he taught many prominent musicians, among them Ruth Laredo. She is widely recognized for her Rachmaninoff expertise and was the featured artist on another program here the same week.

Kottler knew Rachmaninoff personally and played this concerto before him as well as other selections.

It was that part of the program that I found to be the most fascinating of all the events of that long week, without intending to diminish the others.

Kottler's magic is in his ability to transform the past into the present and make it alive. Only one who is

full of life himself is capable of breathing so much life into these treasures of a bygone era.

THE RACHMANINOFF SECOND Concerto is, of course, extremely difficult technically. It is certainly not suitable material for somebody "over the hill." But when observing Kottler playing this familiar music, time and age become meaningless.

The fascination, however, isn't confined to the display of technique, which in itself was impressive and precise for a person at any age. It was the quality of sound, the feeling conveyed with each note that produced a sense of authenticity that one is unlikely to find anywhere else.

The final, lavish passages on this occasion revealed Rachmaninoff to me in a light I have never experienced before, in spite of many exposures to the work.

When we unearth ancient artifacts, we can imagine, through their present layers of dust, their past splendor. When Kottler plays Rachmaninoff, there is no layer of dust. The past becomes the actual reality.

THE PERFORMANCE of the Rachmaninoff concerto brought the

audience to its feet instantly following the final chords, a reaction one seldom observes these days. Kottler obliged the cheering and adoring audience by playing three encores, including his own gavotte.

The others were Rachmaninoff's arrangement of Kreisler's "Liebesleid" and Chopin's Waltz in C Sharp Minor.

Maestro Di Biasi and the Oakway Symphony should be commended for their excellent effort with the Rachmaninoff concerto. The rhythmic

problems in this work are very significant.

While there were some occasions, as in the agitated passages of the second movement, that soloist and orchestra tended to drift apart, the gap would close before any serious damage was done. Any less capable orchestra would inevitably fall apart.

Mischa Kottler will be performing at 3:30 p.m. Sunday on the Liszt Festival, presented by the Lyric Chamber Ensemble at Orchestra Hall.

Concert ends season

Soprano Ernestine Nimmons and pianist Lawrence LaGore will conclude the 1986 Marygrove College "Saturdays at Four" music series at 4 p.m. Saturday in Denk Chapman Hall.

They will give a joint recital of works by Handel, Mozart, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt and Gershwin. Tickets, \$6 general admission and \$3 students and senior citizens.

will be available at the door. Marygrove College is at 8425 West McNichols at Wyoming in northwest Detroit.

LaGore will perform Mozart's Sonata K. 311 and Chopin's Nocturne in C Sharp Minor, Improvising in A Flat and Ballade in G Minor. He will accompany Nimmons in her selection of songs by Handel, Liszt, Schumann and Gershwin.

Chamber Ensemble slates all Liszt

The Lyric Chamber Ensemble will give an All-Liszt Festival at 3:30 p.m. Sunday, May 4, at Orchestra Hall. The program, featuring five Michigan pianists and actors from the Attie Theatre, is a benefit for the Detroit Waldorf School.

Mischa Kottler, pianist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra for many years, will play the "Mephisto Waltz," which he studied with Emil von Sauer who was one of Liszt's students, the Etude in f minor and "Auf dem Wasser zu Singen" (a transcription of Schubert's song).

Michael Gurt, winner of the 1982

Gina Bachauer Competition, will perform the Don Juan Fantasia and Fedora Horowitz, artistic director of the Lyric Chamber Ensemble, will join Joseph Gurt, a member of the Eastern Michigan University faculty, for Concerto Pathétique, for two pianos.

Vladuskav Kavalshy of the Wayne State University faculty, will play "La Campanelle," Valse Op. 64 No. 3 and the Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6. Soprano Ernestine Nimmons will sing "Es Mss ein Wunderbares sein," "King leise mein lied" and "Oh, quond j'adors."

Actors from the Attie Theatre will give readings from Liszt's love letters.

Tickets for the festival can be or-

dered by calling 822-8390 or at the box office, ask specifically for the Waldorf benefit tickets for the May 4 concert.

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