

Hot time in the ol' pavilion last week

By Avigdor Zaremp
special writer

Czech music and artists were the order of the evening at Meadow Brook last week. Dvorak was the single composer featured on the program.

Guest artists were violinist Ernst Kovacic on Thursday and pianist Rudolph Firkusny on Sunday performing Dvorak concerti for their respective instruments.

The two orchestral works — the Othello Overture and the Symphony No. 8 — were on both programs. Conductor was Czech-born, Jiri Belohlavek. Regrettably, I was unable to attend the Sunday program featuring Firkusny.

Dvorak's music evokes different reactions among different people, ranging from outright scorn by at least one of my fellow critics to adoration by others. Then, there are those who feel that Dvorak's music ranges from the sublime to the terrible — a view that is closer to my own. This program, indeed, was an example of these different levels of quality.

Some of the circumstances present during the performance on Thursday had a dampening effect. One culprit was the hot and muggy weather, which was responsible for a universal sense of human suffering. This, of course, is one of those things that are beyond human control, at least in the case of an outdoor event.

Another source of annoyance, which is present on almost any program, but that was particularly

obnoxious on this one was the multitude of cruising airplanes. This time, however, this disruption went beyond the occasional incident.

A LOW-FLYING helicopter was overhead during the violin concerto and there were at least six major disruptions during the symphony with the sounds coming closer all the time. Somebody in the audience voiced the idea that President Reagan should sell us some anti-aircraft missiles, which seemed a very tempting solution indeed.

In view of these negative factors, the performances should be commended for their excellent effort, resulting in a program offering as much enjoyment as possible under the circumstances. The introductory strings in the Othello Overture sounded as if they were wrapped with wet blankets, but before long it became possible to concentrate on the music.

Kovacic, who is Austrian born of Czech descent, proved to be an extremely gifted young musician. Dvorak's violin concerto is in the higher quality range of his music. It is one of the prominent jewels of the violin repertoire and this performance reinforced that.

This was in spite of the fact that Kovacic and Belohlavek were sweating it out with long-sleeved jackets (the rest of the musicians were wearing short-sleeved shirts). While art and suffering are frequently linked together, it seems to me that there is room to relax the rigid dress code for



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occasions like that, especially if it would offer more freedom to concentrate on the music.

EVEN SO, THE SOUND produced by Kovacic was uncompromised in vibrant energy and richness, with only some occasional soggy passages.

The Symphony No. 8 is, in my opinion, at the low end of Dvorak's quality range. It is even less attractive than some of the little known earlier ones.

Among its uninspired movements I find the final one particularly obnoxious. In contrast, the scherzo offers artistic merit more typical of his better works.

The performances, however, emphasized the work's strengths. The characteristic Dvorak style, for example, emerged in the first movement, in spite of its derivative nature.

The intense applause was followed by a universal rush to air-conditioned shelters, at least for those who had them.

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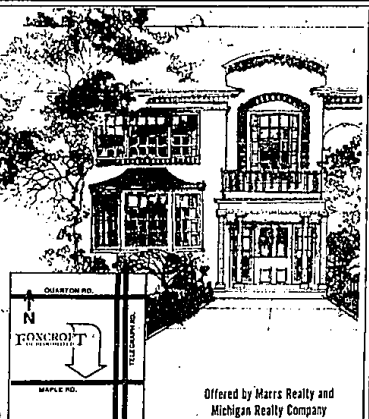
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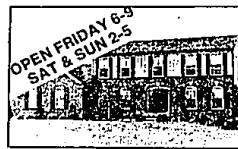
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