

Compositions, artistry go well together

By Avigdor Zoromp
special writer

Wind ensembles are not as popular as string quartets. One reason is the more limited repertoire. Another, itself the cause of reason No. 1, is that the sound of a wind ensemble unsupported by other instruments is to many ears less complete than that of a string ensemble.

Thus, it takes more for wind ensembles to survive than more popular instrumental groups. Determination is important, of course. And for long term success, these musicians need to have a tremendous amount

of skill as well as talent.

The Festival Winds are such a group. Having been in existence since 1959 is commendable. Not all of the members are original ones. Judging by a recent appearance at Orchestra Hall, this group and its long tradition are likely to continue. Their program was part of the Chamber Music Society of Detroit (CMS) series.

Four of the nine members of the group performed - Melvin Kaplan, oboe, Anand Devendra, clarinet, Arthur Weisberg, bassoon and Sharon Moe, horn. They were joined by pianist Menahem Pressler, a member

of the Beaux Arts Trio which played here earlier on the same series.

Compositions by Mozart and Beethoven assured the quality content. This plus the artistry of the musicians made this a most attractive event.

The program consisted of two piano sonatas and two quintets for piano and winds, divided equally between the composers. Each portion of the program consisted of a sonata and a quintet, in that order.

Mozart's Sonata in A Major, K. 331, has been popularized through its last movement, Rondo Alla Turca, also known as the Turkish march. The first movement, a set of varia-

tions on a familiar theme, was also used by Reger for his set of orchestral variations a work played by the Detroit Symphony the next day.

Pressler's performance of this sonata was delightful and remarkable with his delicate touch. My only misgiving was that Pressler played the work with all the repeats, which tended to stretch the variations to a tedious length, even with his ability to make every note enjoyable.

Beethoven's Sonata Op. 110 in A Flat Major, the penultimate of his 32 sonatas, is one of the most monumental structures of its kind. Here Pressler, primarily recognized for

his light and bouncy touch, was faithful to the late Beethoven style. He dug deeply into the massive texture of the music. In the fugue of the last movement, there was the right balance between the style of the baroque form and the added Beethovenian wrinkle.

The two quintets, Beethoven's Op. 16 and Mozart's K. 452, are the only works of this particular instrumental combination in the standard repertoire. Pressler's communication with the musicians was characteristic of his chamber style. It is highly visible rather than subtle and is occasionally criticized.

However, it is pointless to quibble

with minor aspects of stage appearance when the results are so overwhelmingly effective.

With few exceptions, there was a sense of balance and unity. The Beethoven quintet projected youth and exuberance, but not immaturity.

Mozart's work is one of his mature compositions, even though he was approximately the same age as Beethoven when he wrote this work. Such maturity was reflected in the performance without violating its stylistic context.

The Chamber Music Society series will continue with the Israel Sinfonietta on Wednesday, Jan. 28.

Salonen concludes his DSO appearance in style

By Avigdor Zoromp
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Guest conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen concluded his second and final week with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. The 28-year-old maestro made his mark on musicians and listeners alike.

Two of the three works on this program are seldom performed. These are the Variations and the Fugue on a Theme by Mozart, written by Max Reger and the Piano Concerto by Hindemith. Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 4 "Italian" marked the return to more familiar orbit.

Of the first two, Reger's is the more familiar, being based on Mozart's theme for his Sonata K. 331, which was performed just a day earlier by Menahem Pressler at Orchestra Hall (see separate review).

Up to then, I found the Reger work to be excessively gloomy and overbearing, judging by the

recorded versions I've heard. Salonen's invigorating approach brought life and breath to this work. While it still couldn't match Elgar's "Enigma" Variations, this performance put this seldom played composer in a more favorable light.

The piano concerto by Hindemith received its first DSO performance. Pianist Walter Klien, recognized Mozart interpreter, was the soloist. Hindemith was one of Klien's teachers, which may explain his affinity for this neglected work.

Even though Hindemith isn't one of my favorite composers of this century, this performance made it impossible to dismiss this work as insignificant.

Klien's performance went beyond being technically correct and meticulous. It was impossible to be a passive listener. This was especially true in the last movement, which could drive a docile audience into a frenzy.

Mendelssohn's "Italian" Symphony, one of the most frequently performed works in the repertoire, is seldom played with so much vitality.

The tempo of the outer movements was on the fast side, sometimes literally leaving the woodwind players breathless. This, however, seemed a small price for the results achieved. Between these movements, the other emotional ex-

treme was reached in the expressive slow movement and the elegant third movement.

Salonen, who may still betray his youth with his many, sometimes excessive movements on the podium, demonstrated a full, mature, artistic grasp during his two weeks here.

He managed to meet the challenge of making a success of programs that couldn't coast home on their musical content alone. Salonen's approach may seem flamboyant and spontaneous, but underneath is a high degree of artistic comprehension and discipline. These qualities are likely to show up more strongly in the future.

review

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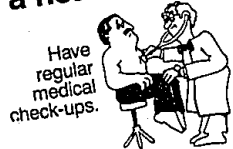
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