

Symphony — music or religion?

By Avigdor Zoramp
special writer

The latest Detroit Symphony Orchestra concert was, in a sense, a religious experience.

This is quite distinct from an "ecstatic" experience. My own feeling was analogous to that which comes upon entering a holy shrine of a different faith.

The dedication and involvement of the true believers may be impressive, but to the outsider, this faith remains mere superstition in spite of the trimmings. Our values dictate that we be tolerant of other faiths, of course. But this is different from personal commitment and involvement.

The religion referred to here is symbolized in one word — Bruckner. His symphony No. 8, his longest, was performed on this program under the orchestra's music director, Gunther Herbig.

Another cult, possibly more secular, was represented by world-renowned flutist Jean Raskin. Raskin performed a flute concerto by American composer, Ezra Laderman (b. 1924).

This is another one of the works by



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American composers commissioned by the DSO and Herbig. It follows the premiere of the piano concerto by Zwilich a week earlier. The flute concerto, which opened the program, was dedicated to Rampal.

LADERMAN OWES His recognition, which is limited, partly to Judy Raskin, an American singer who featured and promoted his works. Raskin died in 1985, before Laderman started his flute concerto and some of the music is written in her memory.

This is represented by a tender theme in the second movement, in the style of Heber by Romantic masters such as Schubert and Schumann. The theme undergoes variations until finally it is left without its melody.

This concerto seems to have mer-

it, judging from this first listening. Its true stature will be determined by the test of time. Rampal seemed to navigate the intricate technical passages successfully. The one advantage in performing a new work is that the performer is sheltered behind the unfamiliar score. Thus any evaluation of such a performance is, at best, tentative.

Rampal's previous appearance with the DSO with more familiar scores was less than satisfactory. While an artist deserves an occasional grace period, Rampal's should be over by now. It is hoped that in subsequent appearances he will find it within himself to emerge from hiding and prove that his high reputation has something to do with the present, not just the past.

The Bruckner religion was in full swing in the performance of his long

symphony. Herbig certainly has an affinity to this music and his knowledge and devotion were apparent at least in the first two movements.

THE CLEAR AND focused sound of the brass, with the overall balanced sound and attention to details was convincing. This devotion carried into the third, slow movement, but that movement's excessive length seemed to doom it. While the notes and the dynamics were still there, the sense of devotion diminished.

While part of it may be attributed to the shorter attention span of many non-believer's ears, there were indications that many of the performing musicians had had enough.

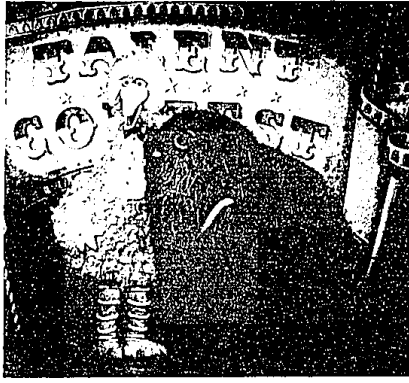
The attitude of "let's get it over with" manifested itself with enunciations that were less focused and sounds that were less authoritative. No reflection on the performers' religious faith, as well as my own, didn't match the endurance required by this work.

In the name of freedom and tolerance, it may be reasonable to expect us to accept this music for what it is, which means an occasional performance, but as far as total devotion, that's going too far.



Sesame Street

Children who view the "Sesame Street" TV show may see the Sesame Street gang live on stage in "Save Our Street," through Sunday, Feb. 8, at Detroit's Cobo Arena. Sesame Street Live, the stage show, is an extension of the original TV show, starring the Muppets created by Jim Henson. The Sesame Street gang has been touring in live stage productions since 1980. For ticket information, call 567-7500.



Violin/piano duo to be artistic ambassadors

Deborah Berman, pianist, dean of Detroit's Institute of Music and Dance, has been selected as artistic ambassador in 1987 for the United States Information Agency.

Berman and Kathleen Winkler, violinist, were one of three duos chosen at the final auditions held last week at the Library of Congress.

The Winkler/Berman Duo was one of 46 ensembles nominated for the competition by major music schools nationwide. The field was narrowed to 12 finalists during the preliminaries held last month.

Berman is responsible for the musical programs at the Institute of Music and Dance, an affiliate of the Center for Creative Studies.

Winkler is on the faculty of the Cleveland Institute of Music and Oberlin Conservatory. She and Berman began concerting together when Winkler was a graduate student at the University of Michigan. Berman, who holds both bachelor's and master's degrees from U-M, was a staff accompanist at the university at the time.

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