

# Return dampened by dismal performance

By Avigdor Zaromp  
special writer

Detroit Symphony Orchestra resumed its regular series last week following a one-month East Coast tour. Its return is always a happy event.

## Celebrating J.S. Bach

The Michigan Bach Festival, March 18-21, will hold one of its six events at Christ Church Cranbrook, a concert at 7:30 p.m. Friday, March 20. The program will be the Christ Church Cranbrook Choir and Baroque Orchestra performing J.S. Bach's Cantata No. 147 and Mozart's Missa Brevis Mass.

Other events in the series are: 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 18, Bach organ recital, Marilyn Mason, Blanche Anderson Moore Hall, School of Music, University of Michigan North campus, Ann Arbor; 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 18, New Ameri-

This program, however, turned out to be one of the least satisfying of the season. This wasn't merely due to the fact that the first portion of the program consisted of 20th century works with limited appeal. As it was, they were more convincing in terms of performance quality than

the rest. They were "The Unanswered Question" by Ives and "Phantasmata," a new work by the Christopher Rouse (which rhymes with the German word "Heraus" which means "Get Out!"). Rouse is a resident composer of the Baltimore Symphony, whose music director, David Zinman, was the guest conductor on this occasion. The middle movement of Rouse's work, "The Infernal Machine," was conceived as an independent work and performed here under Zinman in 1985.

ZINMAN IS AMONG the most talented and respected of our guest conductors. Before the performance of "Phantasmata," he gave a short lecture on the piece with suggestions on how to listen to it.

The opening lives work consists of a dialogue between the strings, the flutes and a trumpet, the latter symbolizing the question. For sound effect, the flutes were positioned in a box off stage to the right and the trumpet (principal, Harmon Parcella) was off stage in the opposite direction.

While I wouldn't go out of my way to hear either of these works (others may feel the same, thus accounting for the small audience), Zinman and the orchestra seemed to do their best



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to extract as much value as possible from these pieces.

The letdown came with the major work on the program — the Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Minor by Brahms. The scheduled pianist, Brigitte Engerer, who became ill, was replaced by Christopher O'Riley of New York. What ensued was one of the most boring renditions of this masterpiece in my recollection.

The excessively slow tempo stretched this work so much that it seemed to last forever. In the slow movement, one could practically fall asleep between the notes. In addition, the total musical concept of the piece was hopelessly lost.

THIS WORK, WRITTEN by Brahms when he was 28, is full of alpine and vigor. While there are many soft, subtle phrases, they are best viewed in the context of preparation for the more climatic statements.

The slow chords in the slow movement, for example, are suggestive of the footsteps of a giant, rather than the anemic, twisted motion of a snail. The faster movements should

be faster, of course. But they also need the kind of vitality that was lacking here.

O'Riley's filled in on short notice, so in all fairness, there were several places suggesting that he had good technical and musical ability. Then too, I had heard the Vienna Philharmonic the day before and that may have heightened my expectations. Whatever the reason, Brahms deserves much better than what was delivered last Thursday. So does the audience.

## Franklin concert set

Franklin Community Church will host a concert of vocal and instrumental music at 8 p.m. Thursday, March 19. This concert of early music on original instruments by Orisama will have the theme, "Colonial Music of America (1723-1800)." It is

presented by the church to celebrate Michigan's Sesquicentennial.

The concert is open to the public without charge. Refreshments will be served following the music, 32473 Normandy, Franklin Village.

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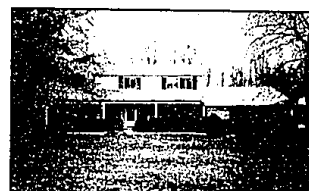
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