

Scriabin work generates unusual response

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

Jerzy Semkow is one of the favorite guest conductors with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. This Polish-born conductor has an extensive track record both here and in Europe. His ability to master unusual works, as well as those in the standard repertoire, was evident in his latest program here.

The first portion consisted of Mozart works — the overture to "The Abduction from the Seraglio" and the Piano Concerto No. 23, K. 488 in A Major. The second portion consisted of the Symphony No. 2 by Scriabin, its first DSO performance.

Pianist Rudolph Buchbinder was the soloist in the Mozart concerto. Born in Austria, Buchbinder absorbed the finest European tradition and is a sought-after pianist. His performance of the Mozart concerto could be characterized as extremely introverted. He avoided the temptation to make the fast passages sound too grand for Mozart's style.

THE TENDENCY to overdo Mozart is a constant problem with the modern instrument. To let the music speak for itself, without undue amplification, is by far the greater challenge.

The slow movement of this concerto, which is uniquely expressive, seemed occasionally to have stopped the heart in mid beat. The clear, rounded phrases in the final movement completed the overall sense of elegance and good proportion.

The unusual nature of Scriabin's symphony is a major deterrent to most conductors. Its sheer length, about an hour, is just one of its problems. Most of Mahler's symphonies are even longer, but at least today they aren't considered as foreign.

Scriabin's music is complex and the effort to penetrate its mystery is more than many would care to attempt.

In less capable hands, Scriabin's second symphony would have been extremely boring and difficult to tolerate. There are few of the Mahlerian sweeping, momentous passages that tend to ease the listening by providing a sense of motion.

SOME OF Scriabin's music seems to take place in a different dimension or universe. While this is a figurative description, Semkow's performance attempted to illustrate this aspect in a way that would be comprehensible to earthly ears. Instead of simple climactic passages that grow consistently louder, an alternation of softness and loudness projected this duality convincingly.

When listening to this music, one may sense behind it a most complex, even tortured mind. The fact that it didn't create a tortured audience is a credit to Maestro Semkow and the DSO.

In certain ways, it transformed the audience. Frequently, the flow of a work is interrupted by applause between movements. On this occasion, however, the ending was greeted by a few clumsy,

halted claps, until Maestro Semkow indicated that it was truly over.

The impact showed up in more subtle ways. Many listeners were lost in thought even when it was time to leave.

There are works that appeal to me much more, to be sure. But few are the works that seem to have so much suggestive power.



Avigdor
Zaromp

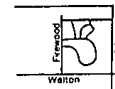
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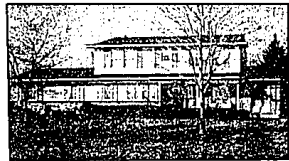
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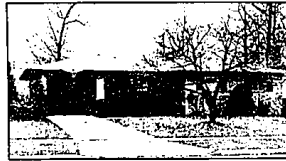
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