

Work becomes spiritual experience

What is the ultimate in quality musical writing? While it is a personal thing, in my case, Bach's St. Matthew Passion would be among the top 10 selections.

Listening to a performance of the St. Matthew Passion can be an intense spiritual experience. This is distinct from a religious experience, which could be possible for those listeners who are religious.

This spiritual experience is a feeling of elevation that is independent of any particular religious belief. It has to do with the appreciation of art — but it goes beyond it. It is a sense of total submission to some superior artistic and creative force. While the St. Matthew Passion uses text based on the Christian theology, its impact is truly universal.

This musical treasure was presented last Thursday by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in its regular program, with music director Gunther Herbig conducting. Given the fact that the average performance frequency of this work is once in a few decades, we are fortunate that maestro Herbig had the good sense and judgment to schedule it.

The vast vocal resources for this performance were beyond Bach's dreams. Reportedly, he had to make do with some 20 singers for the two choirs, who would also double as soloists.

Bach's grand design, however, makes it clear that much larger resources are called for. For this program these consisted of the Detroit Symphony Chorus, divided into two



Avigdor Zoromp

choirs, and the Boy's Choir from Christ Church of Grosse Pointe, which reinforced the soprano in some of the choruses in the first part. These were in addition to the several outstanding soloists.

Among the soloists, tenor Jon Humphrey appeared as an unscheduled replacement for Werner Hoeweg. His solo role as the evangelist was the largest and his clear voice and precise diction were some of the major factors in the appeal of this performance.

Bass-baritone John Cheek had multiple roles as Judas, Peter, first High Priest and solo roles in a couple of arias. He came through his evangelist roles without developing a split personality, but his voice was occasionally insufficient in the arias.

Bass Rudi Van der Meer was convincing, for most part, in his role of Jesus, but had some instability in the lower range. Among the female singers, soprano Arleen Auger was excellent. Mezzo-soprano Carolyn Watkins had her share of good moments, but her voice would taper off in the lower range. Other smaller roles were sung by tenor Ian Partridge, who was adequate, but his

voice had less brightness than that of his colleague Jon Humphrey.

Overall, however, the few shortcomings of the singers were minor and didn't constitute a major setback.

Maestro Herbig is obviously familiar with the music and its particular style. This was reflected in a good choice of tempo, neither too slow nor rushed. The intricate choral portions came through with their inspired, overwhelming music with impressive conviction.

The Basso Continuo, consisting of an organ and a cello (played by assistant principal Marey Chanteaux) was suitable and adequate in the supporting roles. However, whenever the orchestral bass was significant, it fell short. This was the case, for example, in the soprano aria "Blute nur mein Liebes Herz."

The descending bass in the introduction eventually is echoed by the soprano, but was hardly noticeable. Also, in the concluding choir of the first part, "O Mensch," the orchestra features a wonderful counterpoint between the bass and the strings, of which only the latter was clearly heard. A substantial reinforcement

of the bass in these and other places would have vastly improved the effect.

The general high technical level had only few exceptions. One of these, as fate would have it, occurred when the evangelical "false witnesses" sung by Sharon Bacock and Christopher Brodersen, who are members of the choir, clashed hopelessly with the stumbling orchestra. Some may consider it divine intervention — but this amounted more to a comical situation than a serious damage.

One of the more painful aspects of this performance was the many cuts. In its entirety, the complete work lasts at least three hours, not counting intermission. Some cuts seem to be unavoidable for practical considerations, even though I would be willing to listen to every single note, no matter how late it would end. Any surgery to this work of art is painful — there is no good way to cut it short.

However, some cuts may be less painful than others. Among the casualties were some of the best arias, especially in the second part. The aria "Geduld" for tenor and cello obbligato and "Comm. Sueses Kreuz" for bass and viola da gamba are, in my opinion, among the best in this score.

Cutting one of these would have been bad enough — there was no need to cut both. Cutting some more recitatives may have been the lesser evil, even though most of them still amount to masterful music.

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BY: CHANNEL 2
DETROIT NEWS
DETROIT FREE PRESS

British film is a thought-provoking one

"My Beautiful Laundrette" is a story of misplaced hope, unlikely dreams and the different attitudes people assume as they struggle to assimilate. Recently released on videocassette for the home market, the 1985 British film takes a look at the prejudice faced by Pakistanis in Britain through the eyes of Omar (Gordon Warnecke).

Omar's father (Roshan Seth), once an influential leftist journalist in his native country, languishes in a tiny apartment. His motivation has faded with his glory as a writer. Even getting out of bed demands too much energy and an amount of optimism that's barely attainable. Omar, who spends his days waiting on his father and subsisting on public welfare checks, is given a job washing cars by his Uncle Nassar (Saeed Jaffrey).

Uncle was born hustling the coin of the realm. It doesn't matter if most of that realm views him as an interloper. He laments that the old country is no longer good for making money. He's successful enough to keep a British mistress. Jaffrey manages to keep Nassar from turning into a caricature of a man who strives to earn enough money to buy acceptance.

Omar turns out to be a bright and willing if somewhat innocent pupil. Uncle finally hands over to him a hole-in-the-wall laundrette in a working-class neighborhood. It's so



Louise Okrutsky
second runs

tough, the laundry needs a bouncer. It's a job for Omar's punk friend, Johnny (Daniel Day Lewis).

OMAR AND JOHNNY fix it up and dream of limited glory. Powders, the laundrette, boasts an overly ornate neon sign. His walls are painted canary yellow punctuated with a motif of white curling waves. There's an aquarium on one side and Vogue magazine on the coffee tables. It's a monumentally optimistic gesture in an area mowed down by despair.

Lewis infuses Johnny with eccentric gestures. He hops and shimmies as though that's the only outlet for his energy. His emotional and financial pairing with Omar gives him something other than the streets. His friends see him as a traitor. Unemployed, they resent that Johnny is earning money from a Pakistani. The motley gang tells Johnny that the Pakistanis were brought there to work for them.

Meanwhile, Omar's uncle and a family friend, Salim (Dorrick

Branch), the Pakistani community's power broker, treat his partner as a nonentity. He waits outside the house while a business meeting is conducted.

Omar is as quiet and closed as his

community. For him perhaps there isn't truly such a thing as assimilation or total acceptance. It's a matter of living in parallel cultures.

These are people scrambling not for the top but for the first rung on the ladder.

It makes for 94 minutes of interesting viewing, full of quirky performances and wry laughs. Ludus Tonalis' score under the credits, mimicking the chug-chug-pop of a washing machine agitator, stops just short of being cute. Out of a top score of four stars, we'll flip it 2.8. Worth renting for an adult audience.

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