

# Orchestra ranks with the best of its kind

By Avigdor Zoromp  
special writer

The Birmingham-Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra (BBSO) started its 13th season last Sunday at Temple Beth El of Bloomfield Township. This is a departure from previous seasons in which this orchestra performed in a high school auditorium.

"We have decided that it may be time to graduate from high school," said Barbara Diles-Zohl, president of BBSO. Other programs are scheduled for the Birmingham Senhalm Auditorium, the Birmingham Theater and Christ Church Cranbrook.

It would be unrealistic to expect a community orchestra to possess the quality of a major orchestra, of course. But some top-rate quality



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was reflected in this latest program. The fact that Felix Resnick, conductor and music director of the BBSO, and Linda Snedden-Smith, concertmaster and soloist on that program, are both Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) violinists is a plus.

It is also possible that, due to the extra time available as a result of the DSO work stoppage, Resnick and Snedden-Smith were able to dedicate

more of their professional efforts to this orchestra. But even under the best possible leadership, an orchestra can be only as good as its individual musicians. And the quality of these musicians in this performance was impressive.

The program consisted of Weber's overture "Der Freischütz," the Concerto in G minor for Violin and Or-

chestra by Bruch and the Symphony No. 7 by Beethoven.

The peak came with Linda Snedden-Smith as soloist in the Bruch Concerto. Her clean yet richly expressive tone, her effortless handling of the double-stops and her musicianship would have made her performance impressive with an orchestra of any rank and caliber. It was the kind of performance that gave the work body and substance in spite of its syrupy texture.

The orchestra deserves credit for its role as well. Among the noteworthy aspects was the clean and professional sound of the strings. There was none of that amateurish sound with bad intonation that one hears so often with community orchestras. The Weber overture, the shortest

item, turned out to be the weakest. The tempo of the main body of the movement was sluggish and even in that pace there were occasional difficulties in staying together.

The Beethoven symphony received far more impressive treatment. Being one of Beethoven's powerful "odd numbered" symphonies, the Seventh is a demanding work.

Resnick managed to perform even the fast movements at full tempo, which is no easy feat. The slow, second movement, however, should have been played considerably slower and could have benefited from more emphasis on its expressiveness.

A more pertinent problem concerned the brass, especially the horns, which were much too loud.

This was especially true in the third and fourth movements, when monotonous brass themes dominated everything else, making the work sound like a concerto for brass and strings obligato.

The problem may have been caused by the unpredictable acoustics of the hall, which is of unconventional shape. Experimenting with alternate positioning of the musicians should alleviate this problem in the future.

With proper regard for the overall balance, the BBSO is capable of producing a performance of professional level it can be truly proud of. Even in the best orchestras there is room for improvement. Among community orchestras, the BBSO is one of the best.

## East meets West, in music, at Orchestra Hall

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Musical talent from the Far East has been providing competition for established Western institutions for several decades.

Until recently, it was mostly from Japan and Korea. Mainland China, with its population of about one billion, remained a world unto itself until 1976. That was when China started its slow recovery from the cultural setbacks of the "Cultural Revolution."

During the preceding traumatic period, classical music was among many cultural activities that were completely banned and practitioners were jailed or exiled.

The Central Philharmonic Orchestra of China, established in 1956, would have been considered a young orchestra even without more than a decade of disruption by the Cultural Revolution. This orchestra recently performed at Orchestra Hall on the new international series.

It would be impossible to determine the reason for the low atten-

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dance. Possibly the record drop of the Stock Market that day may have been a factor. Musically and artistically, however, I found it to be one of the more rewarding experiences of the new season.

While there were some technical flaws and shortcomings, one couldn't help being impressed with the many

positive and encouraging elements that were present.

In politics, one often hears about "East-West relations." The improved relations between this country and China was reflected in the fact that the program was preceded by playing both national anthems. But the music of the actual selections went

beyond improved relations. There was a sense of unity that is capable of transcending any linguistic and national barriers, in spite of the fact that most of these musicians are not fluent in English.

The program consisted of the overture to Verdi's "La Forza del Destino," the Cello Concerto by Elgar and Symphony No. 8 by Dvorak.

The Elgar Concerto was a substitution for the originally planned Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, because violinist Wang Xiao Dong, who was scheduled to play it injured a finger.

Young cellist Jian Wang, who has been performing before Western as well as Oriental audiences for the past decade, was impressive in this difficult concerto. His big, richly endowed tone quality penetrated even the thickest orchestral textures. For the most part, conductor

Zuohuang Chen was successful in keeping the orchestra out of the soloist's way, enabling Jian Wang to come through even in the more serene and introverted passages.

The frequent changes from agitated, extroverted passages to subdued, introverted ones makes this one of the most demanding concertos for this instrument. In spite of some rough spots, Wang demonstrated artistic talent and maturity in tackling this challenging work.

Maestro Zuohuang Chen had the advantage of being exposed to the best Western musical institutions.

## Concert offers musical foray

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The Detroit Contemporary Chamber Music Ensemble, in its quest to make contemporary music accessible to a wider audience, did it again last Friday.

Bernard Rands, whose reputation as a leading contemporary composer is on the rise, was the featured guest. Two of his works, "Canti del sole" and "Canti Lunatici," written in 1983 and 1981, respectively, were presented.

Barrett Kallellis, music director and conductor of this series, has been dedicated to bringing quality contemporary music to the public for several years. Attracting an audience for this has always been an uphill battle. There was a respectable attendance for this event. The audience filled the Guild Hall of Christ Church Cranbrook.

Kallellis shared his conducting role with James Dawson, who is on the

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faculty of Oakland University and executive producer of this series.

Rands, born in England in 1934, received much of his training in Italy under such recognized masters as Dallapiccola, Maderna and Berio. He came to this country in 1975. Some 70 of his works are regularly performed all over the world, many were commissioned by distinguished musical organizations. Currently, Rands is a professor of composition at Boston University.

Of the two works on the program, for voice and chamber ensemble, "Canti del Sole" was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music in 1984. Prior to that it had been performed by Paul Sperry and the New York Philharmonic, and also by Zubin Mehta at the Horizons '83 Festival. As its

title suggests, the sun is its central topic, while "Canti Lunatici" deals with the moon.

Rands is an unabashed contemporary composer who doesn't resort to tonality as a means of attracting a larger audience, as many others seem to be doing. He isn't squeamish about using an all-out contemporary sound. Not everyone would embrace his music enthusiastically. But the sense of integrity and authority on the subject is undeniable. Rands' knowledge extends beyond the domain of music, into poetry and literature.

The works on the program are based on texts by different poets from different countries, in five different languages. "Canti del Sole" was sung by the young tenor Michael

Pavelich. "Canti Lunatici" was sung by soprano Edith Digory, whom I have heard on previous occasions in mostly contemporary works. The instrumental role was performed by 11 local musicians, many of whom perform regularly in area chamber ensembles.

While my feeling at the beginning of the "Canti del Sole" was a sense of apprehension at the dissonant nature of the music, this gave way to the realization that, in a way, the music made sense.

One could "feel" the different phases and positions of the sun, evoking different associations. Digory was most impressive in the "Canti Lunatici." While portions of the work are based on the common association between the moon and lunacy, the music itself conveyed a sense of sophisticated art, even though it would occasionally resort to harsh means to portray an idea in its peculiar musical language.

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