

# Small audience shows up to hear harpsichordist

By Avigdor Zoromp  
Special writer

The annual Bach festival opened with a recital given by one of the most distinguished Bach performers, Igor Kipnis, renowned harpsichordist. He has been recognized as a top Bach interpreter for many years.

An artist of such caliber should be performing before a select audience on a regular basis. This, however, didn't happen at Orchestra Hall last week. The small audience was barely enough to occupy a few front rows, and even then with a lot of spaces in between.

The music of Bach could never compete with hard rock in terms of audience appeal, a fact that Kipnis is undoubtedly aware of. That may be the reason this program had only one work by J.S. Bach.

The rest was works by Bach's most prominent son, Carl Philip Emanuel Bach. Other compositions were by J.G. Goldberg and the Span-



**Avigdor Zoromp**

ish baroque composer Antonio Soler. Goldberg's only claim to fame is through Bach's Goldberg Variations, which were ostensibly commissioned by Goldberg's mentor, Count Katslering, as a remedy for Goldberg's insomnia.

THE HARPSICHORD SEEMS to suffer from the same neglect as some of the composers on this program. I have heard several distinguished musicians condemn it for its lack of dynamic flexibility. However, in the right hands and with the right kind of music, the harpsichord can be a most sparkling and exciting instrument.

Kipnis is one of the few who can bring this instrument to life. Bach's Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue became an emotional drama in this performance. This, of course, was the case when viewed by baroque standards. The instrument, built by Michigan harpsichord builder Thomas C. P. E. Bach, proved to be capable of singing under these conditions, even with perceived dynamic changes.

The harpsichord, unlike a piano, is incapable of varying its intensity gradually — the only possible changes are by using different registrations. However, the combination of chords and the number of musical

parts has an effect on the total sound.

This, with appropriate use of rubato, can result in musical richness that isn't inferior to the romantic sound obtained with more powerful instruments.

Some may argue that the music of C. P. E. Bach is unjustifiably neglected. Among the several selections on this program, the short items from the book of Anna Magdalena could hardly make a case for this music. These are easy pieces that are regularly assigned to beginning piano students, which were originally attributed to J. S. Bach. These pieces also received the weakest performance, with several wrong or stumbled notes.

IT MAY BE UNDERSTANDABLE if a musician doesn't feel sufficiently challenged by these pieces to invest long hours of practice in them. But if this is the case, why bother to present them to the audience? The same

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may be said about the three short preludes and a prelude by Goldberg. A couple of Goldberg Variations would have been preferable.

Kipnis was impressive with the technical feats required for Soler's Fandango, featuring lively acrobatics around a simple basic harmony.

Kipnis showed a keen sense of humor as he told amusing anecdotes.

All of this, however, doesn't justify the neglect of J. S. Bach on this program. The task of salvaging neglected works by lesser composers could have been restricted.

A program with more music by Bach probably wouldn't have attracted a larger audience, given the reality of our present culture. But this would have been a far better thing to do in terms of artistic integrity. It must have been particularly frustrating for Kipnis that such an extreme sacrifice and compromise in musical content proved to be in vain.

# Lafayette Quartet outdoes itself — one more time

By Avigdor Zoromp  
Special writer

The Lafayette String Quartet is a truly fine chamber group. This is hardly news — it has been stated on several previous occasions. But each concert makes this even clearer.

Their program of quartets by Haydn, Berg and Beethoven at Oakland University last week was an example of a diverse, refined and attractive presentation that is rarely encountered.

The most controversial item on the program — the String Quartet Op. 3 by Alban Berg, proves to be more masterful with every exposure. This feeling may not be universal, Berg, whose financial fortunes were lean most of the time, report-

## review

edly hocked his furniture in order to publish this work. One listener later commented that he would have done a favor to all, including himself, if he had kept the furniture and spared listeners. While such a reaction may be understandable, I strongly disagree with it.

BERG WAS A DISCIPLE of Schoenberg, who was the 'father of atonality, which is still controversial. Berg knew how to imbue this style with the kind of touch and spark that makes the difference between sheer academic formalism and art. (I have no objection to aca-

demie formalism as long as it is artistic as well.)

It should be easy to pick seldom performed works from Haydn's repertoire of more than 80 string quartets. The Quartet Op. 20 No. 2 is one that isn't a mere stylistic duplication of his other works in this category. Its serene aspects and refined structure have some unique elements that can't be taken for granted. Hearing it performed here was an illuminating, learning experience.

Beethoven's Quartet Op. 59 No. 2, the second of the three "Razumovsky" quartets, is one of the challenging staples of the repertoire. The intensity of this performance didn't compromise the overall clarity. There was a penetration beyond the formidable technical challenges, which reached the heart of this monumental music.

THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT wavering was in the fast coda of the final movement where speed compromised accuracy.

The sound of the group was enhanced by the Gaudinini violins that

were loaned to Ann Elliott and Sharon Stanits. This was however an enhancement, not a substitute for their art.

In response to the intense applause, the Lafayette played a minute from another Haydn quartet as an encore.

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