

Budapest orchestra showcases Hungarian talent

By Avigdor Zatzomp
special writer

The Budapest Symphony Orchestra and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra both performed here last week. Comparisons are, at the very least, treacherous.

The Budapest turned out to be one of the most pleasing orchestral experiences this season. Conductor Andras Ligeti, is one of Hungary's leading conductors.

Hungary is recognized for many contributions to music. We are frequently exposed to music by Hungarian composers, performances by Hungarian artists or chamber

groups. Seidom are several of these elements present on one program.

Two of the smaller works on the program were by the Hungarian masters Kodaly and Bartok. In addition, Khachaturian's piano concerto and Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 4 ("Italian") were performed.

TALENT ISN'T RESTRICTED to one nationality, of course. Leonard Pennario, the soloist in the Khachaturian work, dazzled the audience with his impressive artistic as well as technical skills.

Even though this concerto isn't considered to be among the best of the piano repertoire, it sounded masterful in this performance.

There was primitive beauty in the raw, forceful leaping chords and exultant themes.

Pennario also played an etude for the left hand by Scriabin and "The Banjo" by Gottschalk as encores.

Mendelssohn's symphonic masterpiece was more brilliant than ever. The precision and agility even in the fastest passages were of a rare kind. The winds in the final movement fell into place with astonishing coordination and accuracy.

Kodaly's "Dances of Galanta" and Bartok's Dance Suite (1923) were presented with heart and spirit that only an intimate relationship with his music can produce.

The orchestra's encores were the Hungarian Dance No. 5 (in F sharp minor) by Brahms and the Rakoczy March from the "Damnation of Faust" by Berlioz. The Brahms selection was performed by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra under Gunther Herbig recently, also as an encore. The difference was noteworthy.

It is difficult to compare top orchestras on a fair and meaningful basis. The Detroit Symphony Orchestra, which can be a source of pride and artistic fulfillment when at its best, fell short last weekend.

The one impressive ingredient was Russian-born pianist Yefim Bronfman, who gave an excellent per-

formance of the Piano Concerto No. 2 by Saint Saens. This work, which is the only one of Saint Saens's five concerti performed here in recent years, reached a new peak with this performance. The dazzling passages were enhanced with beautifully shaped phrases with no perceivable blurring, which is quite common in many renditions of the rushing final movement.

THE OTHER MAJOR WORK — Elgar's Symphony No. 1 in A Flat Major, was uninspired and boring. Guest conductor Raymond Harvey was visibly active on the podium, waving his arms in all directions. This, however, wasn't enough to lift

this overloaded orchestral bulk off the ground. While this symphony can't compare with the monumental level of the Enigma Variations, it should be still possible to derive more than was evident here.

The opening work, "Swashbuckler" by contemporary American composer Michael Schelle, featured imitations of Wagnerian harmonies and Korngold film scores. It is extremely tonal by contemporary standards. However, the absence of the more disturbing noises isn't, in itself, a guarantee of quality. This performance failed to convince me that a more detailed study of this work would be a good investment of my time.

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