

Pianist displays unconventional approach

Pianist Vladimir Feltsman, who came to this country from the Soviet Union two years ago, presented a solo recital at Temple Israel last week.

When I heard him in Ann Arbor, he performed the Third Concerto by Rachmaninoff. His ferocious technique and total command of the keyboard were notable. In his recital at Temple Israel, where he was free from having to communicate with a conductor, he showed other aspects of his approach emerged.

In the Fantasia in C minor by Mozart, he highlighted more of the dra-



Avigdor Zaromp

matic contrasts in this masterpiece than most performances I have heard. The slow, persistent hammering of the introductory theme may have seemed exaggerated at times, but it was an effective way of drawing attention to the powerful emo-

tional currents. Schubert's Sonata in A Major sounded profound and elaborate in its first two movements. This contrasted with the easy-flowing (but technically difficult) third movement, which I found preferable in

terms of overall approach. The undue dwelling on isolated notes and chords in the earlier movements, while drawing attention, had tended to disrupt the continuity.

Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," is seldom heard in its original piano version. Here, Feltsman's choice of tempo was frequently unconventional. The one that I found most objectionable was the excessively fast Promenade, the theme that supposedly suggests a leisurely walk between galleries. Here it was more reminiscent of a brisk romp, with no pause between it and the fol-

lowing scene.

He also introduced an extraneous Promenade between the "Rich and Poor" and the "Market Place in Limoge." In some of the scenes, such as the "Limoge" and the "Witches' Revelry," Feltsman's impressive technical prowess took precedence over the subject matter. These, however, were exceptions to otherwise good musical paintings. Among the best were the "Ox-cart" and the concluding "Gate of Kiev." Feltsman also played an arrangement by Shostakovich of a Bach prelude — I still prefer the original version.

His immense technical capability

is never in doubt. His artistic and musical approach is sincere and refined, even awe-inspiring where he seems to have resolved most of the artistic dilemmas. In other instances, he is still attempting to come to grips with the inner meaning, an inevitable phase for every artist.

Even though I didn't agree with all of his approaches, it is certainly preferable to a stagnant and unimaginative style. Feltsman is one of the few with artistic imagination, and his continued growth appears certain.

Light program was stronger than expected

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

Flutist Eugenia Zukerman and pianist Andre-Michel Schub combined their talents for a rewarding recital at the Jewish Community Center of West Bloomfield.

The 9 p.m. starting time, in accordance with orthodox Jewish customs which prohibit any travel and work during the Sabbath, was no detriment to the many who showed up for this special event.

Zukerman and Schub are top rank artists. They can sound profound even with a program of mostly light selections.

Works by Mozart, Debussy, Dvorak, Mendelssohn, Ben-Haim and Poulenc were featured. Of these, the Sonata in F Major, K. 376 by Mozart, and the Sonata in G Major by Dvorak were arrangements of the originals, written for piano and violin.

Mozart's sonata, which isn't one of his best works, sounded at least spo-

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radically more substantial than its simplistic exterior. Dvorak's Sonata, arranged for flute by the Israeli conductor Yoav Talini, retained its shiny and bouncy character.

The center of gravity of the program was the works that the artists

performed separately — "Syrinx" by Debussy for unaccompanied flute and Variations Serieuses Op. 54 by Mendelssohn. In the "Syrinx," a short work, Zukerman captured the essence of her instrument and achieved the highest degree of artistic spontaneity.

Schub answered her calling as a soloist in Mendelssohn's challenging variations. The notion of the soft, overly sweet and carefree Mendelssohn was shattered in this performance, giving rise to a most intri-

cate and complex spirit. Some variations, hinting at the future style of Brahms, proved to be among the musical peaks of the program.

"Songs without Words" are known primarily as a collection of piano pieces by Mendelssohn. Much lesser known are three songs by Paul Ben-Haim, a leading Israeli composer who died a few years ago. Ben-Haim may not win a contest against Mendelssohn, but these songs, written in the early '50s, reveal the character of the State of Israel, which

was in its formative years at that time.

A light touch enhanced the neo-romantic style in the concluding Sonata for Flute and Piano by Poulenc.

This was followed by a Scherzino by Joachim Anderson, a composer whom Eugenia Zukerman didn't know much either, according to her statement.

This recital showed that a program that may look light could prove to be quite fulfilling.

Semkow conducts up to his fine reputation

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

Visiting Detroit Symphony Orchestra conductor Jerry Semkow is highly regarded by musicians and audiences. His first of two recent programs featured music by Mozart, Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky.

Mozart's Serenade Nocturna and his Symphony No. 39 have secure places in the standard repertoire as does Tchaikovsky's overture "Romeo and Juliet." Stravinsky's "Jeu de Cartes" has had less exposure, but is still a significant work in this 20th century master's output. All these works received a reading that compensated the lack of a soloist and no voluminous filler from the traditional 19th century repertoire.

Mozart's popular serenade is attempted by many, but few find the optimal balance. Especially in the opening movement it is difficult to draw the line between too much levity

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and undue pomposity. This rendition was one of the few that resolved this dilemma.

MOZART'S SYMPHONY No. 39 opens with an E flat major orchestral chord and is frequently compared to Beethoven's opening chords in some of his works in the same key. Here again, Semkow chose the path that reveals Mozart to be a serious symphonist without overstepping the stylistic bounds of his period. Among Mozart's three last symphonies, No. 39 is overshadowed by the others. A performance like this suggests it has comparable value.

Poker has never been one of my pursuits. But, if I were to attempt to learn more about it, Stravinsky's entertaining ballet, "Jeu de Cartes,"

based on the game, would be a crucial factor. One doesn't have to be a card shark to enjoy the wit and ingenuity of this work. The transformation of the game, some borrowed from more familiar classical works proved to be stimulating even without the actual ballet. A performance with ballet might be a good idea for this and other Stravinsky ballets that are frequently presented here in orchestral form only.

The gradual buildup of "Romeo and Juliet" to its dramatic climax made it sound like a major symphonic work. This music is often presented with reasonable dynamic changes, good overall coordination and accurate notes. But, the story behind the music is taken for granted and tends to get lost. Semkow is one of a few who wouldn't take even

the most popular selection for granted and offered something extra beyond the predictable themes.

In his second week, Semkow presented an all-Strauss program by Richard Strauss and Johann Strauss Jr., who are unrelated.

Jean Philippe Collard, pianist, performed the seldom played Burlesque for Orchestra. His control and touch gave this showy work flavor and substance. "Don Juan," the other work by Richard Strauss, sounded fresh and challenging in spite of its more frequent exposure.

Waltzes by Strauss are primarily entertainment. And while they are not a substitute for music with more depth, Semkow showed that good music and good entertainment can blend successfully.

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