

# Tocco brings new insight to Gershwin's work

By Avigdor Zoromp  
special writer

In the right hands, even music of the lighter variety can become noteworthy. This happened recently with the Detroit Chamber Winds and guest pianist James Tocco.

Detroit Chamber Winds, created in 1982 by Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians, programs seldom performed works that are too small for full orchestra and too large for small chamber groups.

Many such have high entertainment value but may be lacking substance when compared to the heavy stuff. It takes artists of the highest capability to make a case for including such works on a program catering to discriminating audiences.

This program was virtually sold out. There were long lines outside Orchestra Hall hours before the performance. It was necessary to delay the start of the program until most of those in line could be accommodated. It would be far better to open the box office earlier in anticipation for such a response.

Tocco, born in Detroit, is one of the formidable talents from this area who is leaving his imprint on

## review



James Tocco

the world at large. He has appeared with many of the world's great major orchestras, including the DSO and is one of a few artists capable of giving a profound touch to music that is seldom taken seriously.

The program consisted of music by American composers, with the

exception of the Sextet by Poulenc. This opening work for piano and winds is full of Poulenc's satirical, cheeky style, augmented by shades of flavor that are hard to resist.

The rest of the program was works by Copland, Joplin and Gershwin. The Four Piano Blues by Copland, dedicated to various personalities, are among his lesser known pieces. Under Tocco they became living, breathing entities. The Bernstein arrangement of "El Salon Mexico" provided a fresh experience of the familiar music.

The three rags by Joplin, with Craig Riffler at the piano, proved to be entertaining and of short duration. Small doses are best for this music, whose sparkling and nostalgic style tends to become overly predictable in a short while.

Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" is, of course, one of the most popular works of American music. On this occasion, it became much more than a cute piece of popular entertainment. The orchestra, under conductor Robert Reynolds, presented this work in a manner that commanded respect, with Tocco mixing his virtuosity with sparks of genuine, convincing art.

Gershwin may not win a contest against the three B's, at least not in

my mind, but this performance offered a view of Gershwin that was more complex and less frivolous

than usual. Behind the syncopated rhythms and the crafty blues harmonies, one could detect a creation of a

most thoughtful human mind. Only seldom can something so popular become something so special as well.

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## Watercolor artist to speak

Artist Lee Weiss will give a slide talk, "Art and Growth," at 3:45 p.m. Sunday in the Anderson Room, Michigan Union, 530 South State, Ann Arbor.

Weiss is the juror for the 43rd annual Michigan Water Color Exhibition

which continues through Aug. 6 at the University of Michigan Museum of Art.

She has been president of the Watercolor USA Honor Society and is a member of the American Watercolor Society, the National Water Color

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The meeting is open to the public and free, refreshments will be served.

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