

Covelli's style and talent dazzle audience

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

Birmingham Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra's first Pops concert last Thursday evening at Temple Beth El's Handman Hall will be hard to top. Guest conductor-pianist John Covelli was sensational.

Not only does this conductor electrify his orchestra with rhythm, he has a nightclub patter of jokes, a soothing liquid piano style that could sell anything in a TV commercial and a jazzy interpretation of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" that the airlines should hear.

Covelli, who often conducts the Boston Pops Orchestra, believes that the impetus for a concert comes solely from the podium. He also has a firm commitment to the pops literature as the means of keeping our symphonies in the black both on stage and off.

Covelli doesn't go as far as the Denver Symphony, which recently changed over to total pops and hard rock. He doesn't need to. His style, polish and easygoing manner, coupled with his rhythm, makes classical music popular. Last week, he programmed essentially classical music and made it a pops concert.



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HE OPENED with literally a leaping start with Shostakovich's "Galop," and moved right into Offenbach's "Orpheus in the Shades."

Assistant concertmaster Mary Stolberg stepped in for the evening to replace the absent concertmaster Linda Snedden-Smith and performed Orpheus' seducing violin solo. It was hard not to want to try the can-can.

Romantic is the term for Covelli's next interlude of classical music used for movies.

He performed Beethoven's "Für Elise" ("Rosemary's Baby"), moved into Mozart's 21st Piano Concerto ("Elvira Madigan") and closed with the music from the end of the movie "Turning Point," Chopin's Etude No. 1, Op. 25, nicknamed by Robert Schumann the "Harp Etude."

Moving gracefully back and forth between the piano and podium, Covelli conducted the orchestra for the Mozart accompaniment.

THE POPS concert was divided into three sections separated by in-

termissions. At round tables, sectioned off by BSO board member Beth Hoxie's original drawings of the composers, audiences enjoyed light snacks.

For the middle interlude, Covelli had the orchestra perform Smetana's "Dance of the Comedians," Copland's "Saturday Night Waltz" and

"Hoedown" from "Rodeo" and Wilkerson's arrangement of four Broadway melodies.

The "Broadway Medley" and Turok's "A Sousa Overture" were the only two selections that were not crossovers from the classical repertoire. With so much of the classical music used in TV commercials and in films, the line between the two types of music is thinner and thinner.

GERSHWIN'S "Rhapsody in Blue" was not only the climax of the evening, but the highlight. Covelli virtually eliminated the orchestral parts to shorten the 35-minute work and

wove the piano solos together with orchestra accompaniments.

Lively isn't adequate to describe this man's momentum. Next time it would be nice to shorten the rest of the concert and hear the Gershwin in its entirety.

It is the mark of a conductor to make his orchestra perform at its

best and program music for the enjoyment of everyone.

Rarely is it that a conductor can come into town and in three days of rehearsals have such an effect on an orchestra and an audience. Most times the effect is merely professional, not exhilarating.

Covelli was exhilarating.

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French cellist does well by audience

By Avigdor Zoromp
special writer



Avigdor Zoromp

English and French temperaments have often clashed, as history has repeatedly demonstrated. These artistic and cultural manifestations of this are still with us. It is rare when the art and the artist are of a sufficiently high caliber to transcend these chauvinistic tendencies. When this happens — the result can be pure delight.

This was the case in the recent Detroit Symphony Orchestra program, when French cellist Paul Tortelier performed the Concerto for Cello and Orchestra by the English composer, Edward Elgar, with Gunther Herbig conducting.

Not everybody has a high regard for Elgar's music. Certainly, much of it sounds rather mediocre to me. His cello concerto, however, is one of his few works that elevates his art to a top level, at least in the cello rep-

ertoire. Its flexible and vague form, which doesn't conform to the sonata structure, is sometimes criticized. But when performed by a gifted artist, its musical content and significance become an entity that can't be ignored.

Tortelier turned this menu of abstract ideas into a gourmet treat. If this performance had some aspects that may be reminiscent of French cuisine, it seemed to enhance his music, rather than clash with it. In my opinion Elgar would have endorsed this performance wholeheartedly.

Bruckner's Symphony No. 9 was

the second and much longer item on the program. Not many Bruckner fans showed up for the Thursday performance, judging by the many seats that were empty after intermission. Bruckner's 9th Symphony, which is unfinished, is still substantially longer than many conventional symphonies.

As I have stated on several occasions, Bruckner isn't among my favorite composers. I often find his music overly brooding, aimless and redundant. However, this performance seemed to be a labor of love for Maestro Herbig. He was not only in control of the complex, technical as-

pects of this gigantic work — frequently featuring several simultaneous themes — but he demonstrated an unusual emotional commitment to it. Consequently, what frequently sounds like aimless shuffling turned out to be a careful preparation for the emotionally charged peaks.

In its intensity and sense of purpose, this music occasionally became reminiscent of Brahms in shape, if not style. However, I still find Brahms' music substantially superior. Most who are not disposed toward Bruckner's music won't become converts, but Herbig's efforts presented this work in its best light.

To some, it may still sound like monumental monstrosity. But, as in the story of Beauty and the Beast, even a monstrous beast may become handsome if given enough love.

Under Herbig's loving treatment, Bruckner's 9th Symphony appeared impressively handsome. I am not yet ready to marry it, however.

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