

Herbig gives familiar works a fresh touch

By Avigdor Z
special writer

Three masterpieces from the center of the standard repertoire were presented by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra when music director Gunther Herbig returned to the podium.

They were the Symphony No. 5 by Schubert, the Piano Concerto in A Minor by Schumann and the Symphony No. 4 ("Italian") by Mendelssohn. Jutta Czapski, wife of Maestro Herbig and an internationally recognized pianist in her own right, was the soloist in the Schumann concerto.

Among concerti for solo instrument and orchestra, I can't recall one that is more of hazardous for the soloist than this one. The victims which I have witnessed were several internationally known masters of

the keyboard. Czapski was the latest one to encounter some misfortune with this work at Friday's performance. A lapse in the coda to the last movement caused her to lose her position, regaining her stride a few pages later.

AS NIGHTMARISH as such lapses are to a performer, it is a fact of life that they happen, even to the best. In spite of their visibility, such isolated lapses have little bearing on the competence and musicianship of the performer.

This performance had many positive aspects. Among them was smooth intermingling of the roles between the piano and the orchestra. There was a singing quality to some of the themes in the first movement. Czapski's rubato was sometimes extreme, but anticipated by Herbig, who made tailored the orchestral responses, accordingly.

At times it seemed that the piano was too timid — not sufficiently assertive. But the generally delicate approach had merit of its own. Czapski coped well with many of the technically difficult passages, especially some of the awkward arpeggios in the final movement. On Saturday's repeat performance, which I didn't attend, Czapski reportedly performed this concerto without a hitch.

Schubert's Symphony No. 5 is frequently perceived as a carefree work with light texture and attractive melodies. Herbig presented it with a much more substantial impact. I would have preferred a lighter touch in the opening movement. In the final movement, however, the more robust approach, emphasizing some of the intricate counterpoint, was most appropriate. For those many listeners who tend to perceive this work as sweet, but not profound, this approach was enlightening.

MENDELSSOHN'S ITALIAN Symphony was performed with utmost accuracy and discipline, but in a manner that didn't diminish its joy. While its radiant warmth might not have been sufficient to melt the ice on our driveways, it inspired many of us to cope with it. The serene theme of the second movement came through dignified, but with poetic substance, which kept it alive without sounding too formal.

The unusual third movement was majestic without being draggy. The agility of the outer movements didn't compromise the substance. The well punctuated rapid bursts in the final movement made the performance of this popular work into a major triumph. If this symphony may be associated with Italian spaghetti, this course had a lot of meatballs in it, as well as other quite interesting ingredients.

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