

Chamber groups show strengths, weakness

The rich schedule of chamber events continued last week with Detroit Symphony Chamber Orchestra and violinist conductor Joseph Silverstein and the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields and violinist-director, Iona Brown.

Silverstein is one of the leading instrumental soloists to turn to conducting. He has been music director of the Utah Symphony since 1983. Of the artists who have adopted well to the conductor's career and those who are less spectacular, Silverstein is somewhere in between. He is primarily a brilliant violinist as exemplified in his performance of "The Lark Ascending" by Ralph Vaughan Williams. The refined sound of his violin soared to the highest register with no significant distortion.

The other works, Stravinsky's Pulcinella Suite and Mozart's Serenade No. 9, K 320 "Posthorn" put his skills as a conductor to a more rigorous test. In both, his effort was adequate for the most part, but deficient where the scoring was heavier.

In the Pulcinella Suite, the heavy, brassy variations weren't as convincing as the portions where Pergolesi's original themes are more recognizable. IN MOZART'S SERENADE, the more symphonic beginning and ending movements lacked clarity and a sense of direction. The movements in between which are lightly scored and which feature some inspired wind solos, came through with much more elegance. The high standard of the Detroit



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Symphony Orchestra musicians made this program very enjoyable overall, in spite of the flaws.

Silverstein evidently takes his conducting activities very seriously and the possibility of impressive accomplishments in the future shouldn't be overlooked. Right now, I find him far more impressive as a violinist.

The performance approach of the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields

seems to be predominantly introverted, with a sound that strives always to be polished and agreeable. This was apparent in the three program selections — Mendelssohn's String Symphony No. 9, Beethoven's Cavatina from Op. 139 combined with his Grosse Fuge (Great Fugue) Op. 133 and Schoenberg's early masterpiece "Verklarte Nacht." Mendelssohn's string symphonies were written when he was

only 14, the intimate performance of this work outlines its glowing subtleties. Even the faster movements sounded more introspective than carefree. This approach seemed fitting for Beethoven's Cavatina, but less so in the Grosse Fuge. This latter movement, when performed by less competent players, tends to sound more like Schoenberg of the atonal variety than like an early 19th century work.

HERE THE PLAYERS tackled the work too cautiously. While the performance was impressive in its cleanliness and smooth edges, the conscious effort to avoid roughness and dissonances at all costs robbed it of more dramatic impact. This demanding movement isn't tolerant of any fudge-factors in pitch to be sure,

but a more daring approach would have brought it to life.

A more daring approach was present in Schoenberg's "Verklarte Nacht." This early tonal work enjoys more exposure and appreciation than any other work by this composer whose claim to fame is the establishment of the fundamental principles of atonality. This was the one work in which the players showed more daring and extroverted passion.

Brown is an extremely capable violinist in addition to her role as director. She demonstrated effective leadership from her first chair position. This group isn't big on dazzling showmanship, but its more important attention to subtlety makes their music pleasing indeed.

Piano artist Pauline Martin thrives on challenges

By Avigdor Zoromp special writer

Pianist Pauline Martin chose a demanding program for her recital at Oakland University's Varner Hall.

Martin has made some astonishing strides since the days of the "Nightingale" series some 10 years ago, when I first heard her perform on a low-quality instrument.

With works by Mozart, Schumann,

Chopin and Debussy, she included the premier of a work by Elaine F. Leeborn, Bloomfield Hills, composer and teacher.

Mozart sonatas are often regarded as an unworthy challenge by technical virtuosos. Performing them with the clarity and correct stylistic approach can be quite a feat and Martin accomplished this in the Sonata in D Major, K. 576. Most impressive was her fresh and exact execution of

the fast movements. The Fantasia in C Major, Op. 17 by Schumann is seldom performed, and for good reason. The formidable technical challenges put this lengthy work out of reach for many competent pianists. Martin overcame most of these technical obstacles with enough left over for the more subtle musical nuances. Among the exceptions was the second, energetic movement, where the technical ef-

fort tended to strain the music, sometimes to the snapping point. This, however, is the kind of deficiency that time will probably cure, if Martin continues.

A Chopin Etude, Andante Spianato and Grand Polonaise were some additional challenging items on this program. The Polonaise portion was taken at a more leisurely pace than average, but still, it didn't get overly bogged down. A sense of lavishness and grandeur was present, sprinkled

with finely shaped delicate runs. Only few spots showed some technical strain.

"L'isle Joyeuse" by Debussy sparkled with its Impressionistic color. The intensity of the playing would sometimes reach or exceed the stylistic limit, but without breaking the music fabric.

The Suite for Piano by Leeborn was written in 1955. While 35 years may be a long time to wait for a public performance, the quality of this

stylistically accessible work exceeds, in my opinion, that of much more recent music.

Etudes by Rachmaninoff and Chopin were presented as encores for the cheering, applauding audience.

There are many competent pianists with impressive technique these days. Relatively few can elevate themselves above the technical showmanship. Pauline Martin belongs to this select group who can and do.

Soloist's performance inspired

By Avigdor Zoromp special writer

Last week's Detroit Symphony Orchestra program was dominated by 20th century music. The one exception, Strauss's "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks," was chronologically, if not stylistically, close enough. It was written around 1895.

The program presented by guest conductor Michael Morgan was unusual in its scope. Among its central works was the Symphony No. 6 by Martinu, a seldom-performed musical treasure.

Pianist Alicia de Larrocha performed Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major, which is among the more established 20th century works. The program opened with "Siren Song," a short work by the young American composer David Dzubay, who submitted it recently as his master's thesis.

Judging a new, unfamiliar work is always subjective. The list of instruments in Dzubay's score contains a

whole kitchen sink of percussion devices — bells, drums and blocks of all sorts. In my opinion, an actual kitchen sink would have sounded better. Fortunately, the rest of the program was far more attractive.

Among the more impressive was de Larrocha's inspired playing of Ravel's concerto. The diminutive, celebrated Spanish pianist stands tall in the level of her artistic achievements spanning several decades.

The themes in the second movement, which appear simplistic, sounded enchanting in her hands. The tempo in the outer movements was less vivacious than what I would have preferred. The orchestral role sounded undernourished as a result, but there was ample sparkle in the wily pianistic passages. The texture in the first movement was enriched with the artistic spark of classical tradition.

Martinu's symphony was the most impressive orchestral performance while in this program. The full sonorities brought forth the inspiring elements

underneath the layers of chromatic motion. It has been my feeling that music, like wine, needs to age to develop its ultimate taste and quality. Martinu's music seems to have been enough left over for the past few years. The new director-designate of the Detroit Symphony, Neeme Jarvi, once said Martinu would be among his three top choices of composers. While my choice wouldn't be the same, a work such as this makes his statement at least understandable.

The performance of the popular "Till Eulenspiegel" was correct, for most part. Among the ingredients needed were greater flexibility of tempo, more playfulness in the pranky themes and, in general, more latitude in the spirit of this programmatic music.

On the positive side, the sound was well-balance, there was good clarity and the music moved dynamically in the right direction. With more relaxation of the rigid grip this performance could have turned from mere adequate to superb.

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