

Mozart well-treated by Kathleen Winkler

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra subscription concert last week featured a new composition and a young violinist playing a more traditional work. The program was conducted by John Nelson, currently music director of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra who was making his local debut.

The opening work by American composer, Jacob Druckman is titled "Prism." It is based on the story of Medea and Jason and highlights some earlier compositions on the same subject. These are operas by Charpentier, Cavalli and Cherubini. Little known works themselves except among opera experts.

I found more redeeming features in this work than in another opening work played here a week earlier, but Druckman's is still a far cry from a masterpiece.

The composer applies a modern twist to the classical themes, attempting to create a global overview of the conflicting approaches. This is all well and good, but in numerous instances, those twists were getting out of hand, resulting in complete cacophony. Attempting to describe these passages might expose me to a law suit by animal lovers for defamation of character (of the animals, of course).

FORTUNATELY, a Mozart and a Schumann came to the rescue.

The Violin Concerto No. 4 by Mozart was expertly presented by Kathleen Winkler. Her playing was full of grace and charm, bringing out the wonderfully shaped themes. She was supported by a greatly reduced orchestra, consisting mostly of strings with a very few winds. This reduction was indeed appropriate, but the sound was occasionally unbalanced. Some of the orchestral themes, especially in the first movement, evaporated into thin air and the orchestral passages also had a tendency to sound bland and lifeless. A broader, dynamic range would have enhanced the performance considerably.

The closing work of the evening was Schumann's Second Symphony. This is the least performed of the composer's four symphonies and many authorities consider it to be inferior to the others. Schumann was known to have suffered from severe episodes of depression and insanity during its composition. However, this work is certainly superior to many compositions written by allegedly sane composers.

In this performance, conductor Nelson manifested good control and well balanced sound. The slow movement was particularly impressive. The well-written fugal theme in that movement was well-shaped.

While there were numerous empty seats, there was a steady and appreciative audience for this concert. It is hard to measure the impact of individual works on audience attendance.

Future programs will include some

more contemporary works and that may prove to be frustrating for many listeners who like the more traditional, or at least, familiar works. But the masterpieces that follow make such an evening worthwhile.

Even masters such as Beethoven had their share of frustrating premises. This, of course, provides little comfort for the contemporary composer or listener. But there is always the chance that one of these new compositions will prove inspiring.

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