Conductor Max Rudolf leads final concert

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

review

Last weekend marked the end of another Detroit Symphony Orchestra concert season. Guest conductor Max Rudolf is among the better artists whose visit here made this season richer.

The German-born conductor, now 80, is in the process of winding down his long career, and this was supposed to be his last visit here. He will be missed by the appreciative audience.

The program opened with Weber's overture "Oberon." Maestro Rudolf's conducting of this short piece was characterized by authentic presentation with balanced, colorful sound. It was performed as an impressive composition, which it is, rather than merely light overture.

In recent weeks we have been treated to several pairs of compositions by the same composer. Among these were two works each by Wagner, Mozart, Richard Strauss and Haydn. This time there were two compositions by Schumann — almost, but not quite.

UPON CLOSER examination one could notice that one of the names was spelled with only one "n." The title of the composition, "New England Triptych," would be a rather unlikely title by the better known German Romantic composer, Robert Schumann.

If clues weren't enough for any listener, then the music itself would remove any doubt. This work, by the contemporary American composer William Schuman, born 1910, is based on three pieces by William Billings, an 18th-century American composer.

While these original pieces might not be familiar to most listeners, the classical origin of the composition was very apparent in the contemporary work, in spite of the contemporary treatment.

The last of these, "Chester," is based on a sacred chorale, which turns into an aggressive military march, replete with drums and percussions. While Schuman was never one of my favorite composers, the convincing performance presented the composition as a work of value and significance.

This was followed by the concerto for cello and orchestra by Robert Schumann. This proved to be the most problematic work of the evening, due to factors that very little can be done about.

THE CELLIST WAS the renowned Hungarian-born Janos Starker, who is one of the best cellists of today. A major problem with a composition of this kind is that the tonal range of the cello doesn't project very well in a large concert hall, and the inferior accoustics at Ford Auditorium made matters worse. As a result, the few flaws in the performance which would have been minor and inconsequential under more ideal conditions were magnified.

Starker demonstrated a superb, flawless technique, making the playing of the entire composition sound completely effortless.

The music, however, sounded faint and emaciated, frequently overwhelmed by the orchestra in spite of Maestro Rudolf's efforts not to be obtrusive. Maybe some more sweat and toil on the part of Starker would have increased the impact of his instrument.

The program concluded with a very satisfying performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 2. The symphonies of Beethoven are regarded as a prime example of compositions that are performed too frequently. Indeed, Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 was being performed on the radio at the very time this performance was taking place.

It may come as a surprise that no Beethoven symphony has been performed here during the entire season, until this evening. The second symphony is considered to be one of the least acclaimed among Beethoven's nine symphonies. For this concert, however, it sounded as a Beethoven symphony truly should — powerful, impressive and profound.

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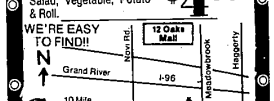

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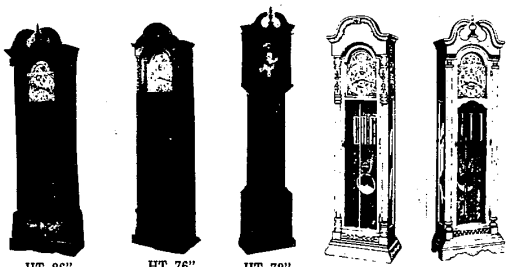

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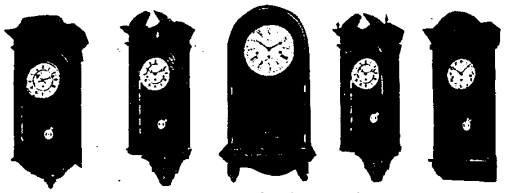

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