

Herbig passes music's acid test

By Arvidor Zaromp
special writer

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra recently presented a special concert that wasn't part of the regular Meadow Brook Festival.

It was a tribute to subscribers and supporters of the orchestra. It was free to those who attended, yet it could be said that it was "sold out."

There was no charge for tickets, but only qualified individuals received an order form, and many of the respondents got negative replies, since all tickets, including lawn tickets, had been allocated.

Guest conductor was the German-born Gunther Herbig. His wife, Julia Czapke, was the soloist in the Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, K. 488. Other works on the program were Beethoven's "Egmont" Overture and the Symphony No. 1 by Brahms.

For Maestro Herbig, this was his debut with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Yet, as contradictions abound, this

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wasn't his first scheduled appearance with the orchestra.

His first visit was last December, during the orchestra's regular season. However, as some might still remember, this was also the time when the orchestra went on strike. The concert was cancelled even though rehearsals did take place.

THIS performance made one realize the extent of the loss in the past. Herbig, who had among his teachers such noted figures as Herbert von Karajan and Hermann Scherchen, showed himself to be a top-rate conductor.

The opening "Egmont" Overture, with its vibrant crescendo, sound moving and inspiring. Its impact was refreshing in spite of its popularity. The Mozart concerto turned out to be the weak link in the program. While

Czapke certainly doesn't lack artistic talent, her rendition of the Mozart concerto didn't match the high level of the other parts of the program.

Although she avoided the temptation of making the arpeggios in the first and third movements inappropriately thundering, she went overboard in the other direction.

Consequently, several passages in the fast movements sounded anemic, bordering on erratic.

The phrasing was frequently fuzzy. One redeeming feature was the colorful, magic touch in the second movement.

The Brahms symphony is the acid test of any seasoned conductor — a test which Herbig passed with flying colors.

An outstanding performance of this composition was given by Bertini during the 1981-82 season, and that performance is still fresh in my mind.

From the opening, faithful timpani beat, the magnificent work gradually evolved with all its awe and glory. The introduction to the final movement, with the unconventional pizzicato, had an aura of mystery to it, from which the main theme emerged naturally.

It is an extreme challenge to perform that segment in a way that integrates it smoothly with the rest of the movement. In too many performances this passage sounds very awkward.

The main theme of the final movement was somewhat slower than usual, but the building intensity was accompanied by an acceleration of the tempo, which made the peaks even more spectacular. Maestro Herbig maintained full balance and control up to the tumultuous ending.

As it is known, Brahms approached his symphonies with utmost caution and anxiety, unlike Mozart and Haydn. His first symphony was written when he was in his 40s. Had Brahms been alive and listening to this performance, undoubtedly, he would have been very proud.

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(B.F.11C)



Elegant evenings

Alexander Zonjic, Windsor flutist, will perform with his quintet at 5:15 p.m. Friday at P.Jazz at downtown Detroit's Hotel Pontchartrain. Other concert dates in the metropolitan area include playing with the Bob James Band at the Meadow Brook Music Festival on Aug. 15 at Oakland University near Rochester and a return to P.Jazz on Aug. 17. Zonjic's current album release is "Elegant Evening."

Concert lacked that extra spice

By Arvidor Zaromp
special writer

The guest conductor at the Meadow Brook Festival last week was Italian-born maestro Gastano Delogu.

Currently music director of the Denver Symphony Orchestra, Delogu has appeared with many major orchestras in this country and abroad. It is reported that his 1978 New Zealand tour left critics there "gasping for superlatives."

Not being the gassing type, I am contemplating the underlining of a massive shipment of superlatives to my gassing colleagues in New Zealand.

This isn't to diminish the talent and potential of Delogu. His program, which consisted mostly of works by Ravel, demonstrated a level of competence that was pleasing in some respects. But it didn't have those extra ingredients that are necessary to make it outstanding.

The Ravel works on the program consisted of "Alborada del Gracioso," the Daphnis and Chloe Suite No. 2 and the popular "Bolero." The only non-Ravel work on the program was the Piano Concerto No. 2 in A Major by Liszt, with guest pianist Russell Sherman. Why not a piano concerto by Ravel as well? That's because his G Major Piano Concerto is scheduled to be performed this week.

THE RAVEL compositions were enhanced by the abilities of the various soloists, who proved to be very capable. But the brightness and color were somewhat inhibited by the rigid, and occasionally

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hurried, tempo, especially in the "Alborada" and the suite.

In the first of these, credit should be given to principal bassist Robert Williams for his impressive solos. He is known to local audiences also as a member of the Bassoon Quartet, exhibiting a mixture of music and humor. This occasion portrayed his more serious aspect.

Pianist Sherman, who was born in New York and has appeared and recorded with major orchestras, proved to be an extremely talented pianist. His rendition of the Liszt concerto, which is regarded by many as a showpiece, showed artistic insight and delicacy.

Even the most technically demanding segments were presented with grace and apparent ease. There was none of the tossing of hands into the air or leaping off the bench.

His refined playing occasionally was overshadowed by the orchestra. But the major drawback was the composition itself, which, with its fragmented themes, isn't one of my favorites. The first concerto, in E flat major, is much more rich in musical content.

THE DAPHNIS and Chloe Suite had some good solo parts, especially a segment with principal cel-

list Italo Babilini, but its overall impact was diminished. This ballet was performed in its entirety last summer with Maestro Gary Bertini conducting, and the difference was quite remarkable.

In the present performance, the richness of orchestral color wasn't quite there, and the tempo at the end was exaggerated. Some more inspiration was definitely called for.

The program ended with Ravel's "Bolero." The performance of this piece, which is the longest crescendo in the world, was as good as one can expect. The work, which even Ravel himself later denounced, is overly repetitious, with the only variety provided by different shades of orchestration.

These shades were aptly presented by the capable players, and the gradual crescendo was well paced and measured. Percussionist Robert Pangborn, a couple of days later, remarked that his arm muscles must have been strengthened by the monotonous, intensifying beat. The work has some merits and a popular appeal, but it can't be termed a masterpiece.

This week, things should pick up again with guest conductor Semyon Bychkov, who has proved to be very successful here in the past.

What's Line gives tips on events in metro area

A call to the Metropolitan Detroit Convention and Visitors Bureau's "What's Line" is the hot line to happenings in the Detroit area.

The What's Line message is recorded daily and highlights theater, sports, concerts, nightlife, music and other special events occurring in the tri-county area.

The convention bureau initiated the Visitors' Hot Line in 1975 to inform visitors of the variety of things to do in Greater Detroit.

It was christened the "What's Line" and formally introduced to the Detroit area in 1978 after a survey revealed

that many Detroit-area residents also used the free service.

An average of 2,000 calls are received each month. During such major events as the Detroit International Grand Prix, International Freedom Festival and Montreux-Detroit Jazz Festival, the number of daily calls to the What's Line triples.

Organizations interested in having an upcoming event placed on the What's Line should address the announcement to: Lori E. Miller, What's Line, Metropolitan Detroit Convention and Visitors Bureau, 100 Renaissance Center, Suite 1950, Detroit 48243.

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