

Pianist Bartkiewicz highlights concert

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(BWT, RoJE)

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

Following a program by the Southfield Symphony Orchestra a week earlier, I had the opportunity to listen to another prominent community orchestra — the Rochester Symphony Orchestra. Besides the advantage of being close to home, this program had several

other aspects to recommend it, even for ears that have been acoustically spoiled by the sound of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

Conductor James Hohmeyer has a talent for combining the profound and the popular into a meaningful event. The classical part consisted of works by Bach, Shostakovich and Chopin, with popular Christmas tunes by Anderson

sprinkled in between.

TOWARD the end, the Good Times Quartet, a barbershop-style group of talented ladies was featured and the audience participated in enthusiastic singing of Christmas carols.

It was evident that the orchestra felt more at ease with the popular selections, exhibiting good tone quality and unabashed enthusiasm. In Anderson's Christmas Festival, the simplistic tune of "Jingle Bells" emerged with impressive, almost symphonic significance.

In the classical selections the musicians had their share of difficulties, to be sure, but there was no lack of rewarding moments. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 is one of the most demanding pieces for the harpsichord, featuring a long and brilliant cadenza in its first movement.

Harpisichordist David Butzu, a student of Mischa Kottler, was convincing and impressive. The lightning fast runs in the cadenza were well executed, with the exception of a couple of minor

snags.

The other soloists, flutist Wendy Pardee, principal in her section, and concertmaster Alan Macnair, were equally impressive.

THE ROLE of the string orchestra was less than perfect, but acceptable. While there were some problems in terms of technique and intonation, stylistically they were on the right track, which is more that one could say about some more professional orchestras performing baroque compositions.

The one truly regrettable fact was that the second and third movements were left out, even though they are considerably shorter than the first, possibly Bach's longest.

Following a good rendition of the Festive Overture by Shostakovich, the high point in terms of performance quality was achieved with Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Minor.

This applies only to the piano part, which in Chopin's music is most im-



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portant. The orchestral part, on the other hand, was the only aspect of the program that was truly terrible, and that was one occasion in which one could feel grateful for the fact that Chopin gave the orchestra a very limited role in his concertos.

The true star of the evening was the Polish-born pianist Leszek Bartkiewicz, who has been gaining in prominence here in the last couple of years.

His technique was most secure, with the piano passages thundering with authority in the outer movement and eliciting an exquisite, expressive touch in

the middle movement. That was Chopin with his true, authentic sparkle.

Bartkiewicz would have been a credit to any major symphony orchestra with this performance. It is hoped that some day he will achieve that opportunity — he truly deserves it.

This is not meant to downgrade the value of the Rochester Symphony Orchestra, however. Given the perspective, it is a fine enthusiastic community orchestra. It has been serving the community well for more than 20 years, and it is hoped that it will continue to do so for many years to come.

Soloist provides exciting moments

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Ford Auditorium was full almost to capacity last Thursday, a rare occurrence in the regular subscription series of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Most things have a reason, however, and this was no exception.

The selections on the program were attractive, with a proven track record. These consisted of the Bratsvi Violin Concerto, the Symphony No. 9 "New World" by Dvorak with the Prelude to the First Act of Lohengrin, by Wagner, as an opening piece.

This was the second consecutive program under Music Director Gunther Herbig. The guest soloist was violinist Pierre Amoyal. This French violinist was substituted for Il'yenryk Stryng, who had to cancel because of extreme fatigue. The name of Stryng, among the world's most renowned violinists, explains the large crowd.

WHILE Stryng's cancellation was most regrettable, Amoyal possesses a considerable talent. His name isn't nearly as well known, but this is likely to change in the future. Amoyal appeared with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra last season, performing the Berg violin concerto. To this time, he proved that he can be most impressive with a familiar selection as well.

One of the major challenges in performing a familiar work is being vulnerable to comparisons. Amoyal's performance wasn't one of the cleanest I have heard. Some passages, the introductory run in the first movement, for example, were lacking in precision.

Another flaw was in the second

movement, in which many passages sounded too casual, failing to savor the expressive quality of the slow notes. Other aspects of the work, however, compensated for these shortcomings.

The themes in the first movement were presented with authority. The main theme in the last movement commanded respect with its forceful thirds. The DSO was also equal to the task under Herbig. Most impressive was the coda in the final movement, which was one of the fastest versions I have heard yet. It radiated with brilliance, with both soloist and orchestra exhibiting uncompromised precision.

THE "NEW WORLD" Symphony is one of those works that tend to be taken for granted. This wasn't the case here. There was nothing unorthodox about this performance — no unusual tempo or contrived sound effects, but there was evidence of an awareness of the most minute details. There was good sound balance, with every orchestral group occupying a well-defined position in the grand design.

In the final movement, for example, the percussion and the brass were an extension of the rest of the orchestra, without any compromise in momentum. There is a fine line between the predictable and the shocking. Maestro Herbig seems to know exactly where these boundaries are.

The performance of the Prelude from Lohengrin was a manifestation of orchestral continuity. The natural development of the theme and its expansion from the violins to the rest of the orchestra was done in a fashion that left no doubt about the vast potential of this orchestra under its present music director.

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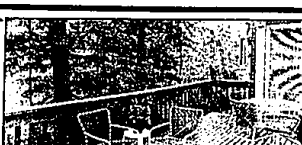
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