

Gutierrez makes it sound easy

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

One frequent complaint about the Detroit Symphony Orchestra programs is the steady diet of standard repertoire. These criticisms were laid to rest at least during the first portion of the recent program.

The two works featured in that portion of the program were far removed from the standard and familiar. The first "The Infernal Machine," composed by the young American Christopher House in 1981, received its first DSO performance on this occasion.

The second, "Faltstaff," a symphonic study by Elgar, while certainly in more traditional vein, is nevertheless one of this composer's more obscure creations.

The second portion of the program reverted to the more familiar domain — the Piano Concerto No. 1 by Tchaikovsky. Guest pianist was Cuban-born Horacio Gutierrez.

By nature, being symphonist and skeptical of new works, I have to admit that I hadn't been looking forward with eagerness to the Rouse composition. That might be for the reason fate punished me for my prejudice by providing snowy weather and slippery conditions last Thursday night, causing me to miss the short work, that lasts only six minutes.

THIS TURNED out to be my loss,

since according to the subsequent accounts, the work with exciting rhythms proved to be pleasing and exciting to audience and musicians alike.

Clearly, this evaluation is purely hearsay. Fortunately, fate spared me from the more serious accidents that occurred along the road in large numbers.

The Elgar work, a composition of symphonic dimensions, lasts approximately 40 minutes. It is one of several musical works based on that Shakespearean character, Falstaff, the most noted among them being Verdi's famous opera.

In Elgar's output, it is also one work that features a sense of humor without being shallow. Elgar's depiction of Falstaff, however, goes beyond the comic features and escapes so aptly portrayed by Orson Welles in the cinematic versions.

Zinnman's conducting and the orchestra's unreserved response highlighted the subtle and contradictory descriptions of the complex character. There was the light-hearted, bouncy mood in the second of the four episodes, to be sure. But there was no compromise in the high professional standard, including the high skill of the many solo passages by several instruments.

On the other hand, the more serious and ominous final episodes, like "Falstaff's March," were brought forth with dignity, utilizing the elements of full



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orchestral sonority, without being overbearing.

Pianist Gutierrez had been originally scheduled to perform the First Brahms Concerto. The change to Tchaikovsky was a last-minute decision. His numerous performances of this work, one doesn't expect too many surprises. This, however, proved to be one of the few exceptions.

It is a widely held opinion that the Tchaikovsky concerto, unlike those by Brahms or Beethoven, for example, offers more technical challenge than musical content. It is true, of course, that the Tchaikovsky concerto is very demanding technically. One can also serve many competent pianists over coming these technical challenges in one form or another.

IT IS RARE, however, to hear somebody who can afford to go beyond the immediate technique. Gutierrez performed the work in a manner that seemed natural, almost easy. There was no huffing and puffing, no swinging

of the arms high into the air or bouncing up from the seat. The fingers would reach their destination by the shortest possible route, making it seem as if almost anybody could do it (but, don't kid yourself).

On the other hand, Gutierrez had ample reserve to listen to the orchestral parts, which were very aptly handled and to wholly integrate his lines with theirs.

The playful, bouncy portion of the second movement, for example, was a rare combination of fun and art of the highest form. There is an endless debate about the relative importance of technique vs. artistic insight.

Gutierrez seems to have come up with an excellent solution of this dilemma, at least for this performance. His technique here was in itself a sophisticated form of art and at the same time in the service of art.

Through it, Tchaikovsky's familiar work emerged with more stature than most of us would have credited it with before.

Chamber Players are on their way

By Ruth Zaromp
special writer

Tuesday night's performance of the Renaissance City Chamber Players, RCP, at Orchestra Hall provided a blend of composers of different times. Yet, put together, they created an overall feeling of romanticism. Of the four, only Mendelssohn and Faure belong to the Romantic period.

The Bach-Mozart's Prelude and Fugue in D for String Trio sounded very romantic and the "Choses vues a droite et a gauche (sans lunettes)," or, "Things one can see left and right without glasses," by Satie, seemed to find its place very easily along the Faure, with the same artists and instruments uniting the two pieces in temperament.

Mozart's rendition of the Prelude and Fugue seems to possess some romantic characteristics. The Prelude is written by Mozart, per se, and in his style. However, the Fugue is based on a fugue by Bach from the "Well-Tempered Clavier" and is written for a trio of instruments. The performance accentuated both styles in an authentic manner.

THE SOLOIST was Flavio Varani, well-known area pianist. His mode of playing suited the Orchestra Hall acoustics very well. Known to have a relatively heavy hand, the dynamics of the instrument sounded good in the larger hall.

Varani managed to breathe life into the two pieces he played, providing them with a broad range of dynamics that took them out of the realm of the mundane. The short satirical pieces by Satie for

piano and violin (played by Misha Rachlevsky) were captivating, if somewhat reserved.

This was followed by the rarely performed Piano Quartet in G Minor by Faure. Here, however, there was a lack of unified approach to the pieces by all of the musicians. It was quite evident that the string players were playing with a different attitude than the soloist was, their dynamics being more subdued and didn't support the colors that were being brought out by the soloist.

Thus, it was like two different approaches to the same music were being performed at the same time, a fact that diminished the force of the ideas being portrayed.

The work sounded heavier more sombre and intricate than Faure's style normally would indicate. The cello was frequently overshadowed by the pi-

ano, as was the case with the delicate pizzicato in the second movement.

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