

Mozart's Requiem highlights season

By Avigdor Zaremp
special writer

Mozart was the only composer on the latest Detroit Symphony Orchestra program. Among the many moods and emotions evoked by his music, few are as effective as the use of minor keys. And the minor mode dominated this unusual program.

The first half of the program consisted of the Piano Concerto K. 491 in C minor. It is the second of only two of Mozart's minor key concerti from among the 27 listed. The other item, less often performed, is one of the landmarks of classical music,



the D Minor Requiem, Mozart's final work.

Considered to be one of his most overpowering creations, it is, ironically, not wholly written by him. Portions were completed by his pupil Süssmayr. Judging by the finished product, the latter must have

been an unrecognized genius or else Mozart's instructions and sketches provided precise clues. Either way, a good performance of this masterpiece never fails to leave the audience awe-stricken.

THE SOLOIST in the piano concerto was the Hungarian artist, Andor Foldes, 73, making his DSO debut. The performance of this work turned out to be problematic. This wasn't due to any incompetence on the part of the DSO or Foldes.

This concerto is a combination of intimate and large scale. The highness, however, only is implied by the music. Any attempt to bolster it with an elaborate support system is bound to miss the mark.

Here, however, Maestro Gunther Herbig and Foldes seemed to have opposite approaches. The delicate, subdued passages tended to sound anemic in the shadow of the looming, oversized orchestra. Both should have made some adjustments — Herbig by cutting down on the size of

the orchestra and Foldes by providing a little more body that would accommodate the needs of a modern concert hall without sounding Beethovenian. Foldes, a fine pianist, would make a much better impression under different circumstances.

The impressive performing forces in the Requiem were the Detroit Symphony Chorus together with soloists Marvis Martin, soprano, Zeharah Gal, mezzo soprano, John Aler, tenor, and Michael Devlin, bass-baritone.

The orchestral and choral roles were finely tuned. The fugues, possibly Mozart's best, were among the most impressive renditions I have heard of this work.

to in the lower range. While such individual differences can't be completely eliminated, some adjustments should have been possible.

These small flaws notwithstanding, this performance of Mozart's masterpiece was one of the highlights of this season's far.

MOT takes off with 'Butterfly'

By Mary Jane Doerr

At the opening of "Madama Butterfly" at the Fisher Theatre, Maria Spacagna revealed more of the lovely voice that charmed Italian audiences last year at La Scala.

Michigan Opera Theatre's "Butterfly" was as refined and distinctive as "Orpheus in the Underworld" was experimental.

Butterfly was composer Puccini's most-loved heroine and he would have been delighted with this one. She was gentle, emotional, devoted, faithful and too good for her world — the tragic flaw that led her to suicide.

American-born Spacagna's Italian was real also since she grew up speaking it. Her geisha-girl movements, small stature and somewhat more active interpretation made this broken-hearted Japanese bride come alive.

During the two-and-one-half hour opera, Butterfly is on stage most of the time. Spacagna avoided any harshness in her first aria, "Spirita sul mare," by taking her high notes pianissimo, adding a soft touch that revealed Madama Butterfly's fragile character. Her famous Act II aria, "Un bel di vedremo," was delivered with power and restraint.

THE WONDERFUL MICHIGAN mezzo-soprano, Kathleen Seger, (now with the New York City Opera) sang her first Suzuki, a change from her other roles. She blended exquisitely with Spacagna in "Gattiameo a mani pie."

Unfortunately, Cornell MacNeil was disappointing as the ugly American, B.F. Pinkerton. MacNeil looked the part of the all American, well-bred snob who married Butterfly according to Japanese custom, laughing at the 999-year contract, as he drank to the day when he would marry a real bride.

MacNeil's acting wouldn't convince anyone that Butterfly would fall so in love with him as to wait three years for his return while she raised his son. Neither was MacNeil's change of heart believ-

able when he took Butterfly in his arms as she died. His tenor voice was passable, but devoid of feeling.

George Massey gave an interesting portrayal of the American consul, Sharpless. Massey's baritone was nicely focused during the fragile situation with Butterfly in the latter scene, making it seem as difficult as it would have been.

The MOT orchestra was under-rehearsed, but still should have sounded more polished because it is under the able leadership of Joseph Rescigno, last spring's "Turandot" conductor.

The production continues through Nov. 2. Tickets are available by calling MOT Box Office at 874-SING.

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