

# Covelli's style and talent dazzle audience

By Mary Jane Doerr  
special writer

Birmingham Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra's first Pops concert last Thursday evening at Temple Beth El's Handelman Hall will be hard to top. Guest conductor- pianist John Covelli was sensational.

Not only does this conductor electrify his orchestra with rhythm, he has a nightclub patter of jokes, a soothing liquid piano style that could sell anything in a TV commercial and a jazzy interpretation of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" that the airlines should hear.

Covelli, who often conducts the Boston Pops Orchestra, believes that the impetus for a concert comes solely from the podium. He also has a firm commitment to the pops literature as the means of keeping our symphonies in the black both on stage and off.

Covelli doesn't go as far as the Denver Symphony, which recently changed over to total pops and hard rock. He doesn't need to. His style, polish and easygoing manner, coupled with his rhythm, makes classical music popular. Last week, he programmed essentially classical music and made it a pops concert.

HE OPENED with literally a leaping start with Shostakovich's "Galop," and moved right into Offenbach's "Orpheus in the Hades."

Assistant concertmaster Mary Stolberg stepped in for the evening to replace the absent concertmaster Linda Snedden-Smith and performed Orpheus' seducing violin solo. It was hard not to want to try the can-can.

Romantic is the term for Covelli's next interlude of classical music used for movies.

He performed Beethoven's "Für Elise" ("Rosemary's Baby"), moved into Mozart's 21st Piano Concerto ("Elvira Madigan") and closed with

the music from the end of the movie "Turning Point," Chopin's Etude No. 1, Op. 25, nicknamed by Robert Schumann the "Harp Etude."

Moving gracefully back and forth between the piano and podium, Covelli conducted the orchestra for the Mozart accompaniment.

THE POPS concert was divided into three sections separated by intermissions. At round tables, sectioned off by BBSO board member Beth Hoxie's original drawings of the composers, audiences enjoyed light snacks.

For the middle interlude, Covelli had the orchestra perform Smetana's "Dance of the Comedians," Copland's "Saturday Night Waltz" and "Hoodlums" from "Rodeo" and Wilkerson's arrangement of four Broadway melodies.

The "Broadway Medley" and Turok's "A Sousa Overture" were the only two selections that were not crossovers from the classical repertoire. With so much of the classical music used in TV commercials and in films, the line between the two types of music is thinner and thinner.

GERSHWIN'S "Rhapsody in Blue" was not only the climax of the evening, but the highlight. Covelli virtu-

ally eliminated the orchestral parts to shorten the 35-minute work and wove the piano solos together with orchestra accompaniments.

Lively isn't adequate to describe this man's momentum. Next time it would be nice to shorten the rest of the concert and hear the Gershwin in its entirety.

It is the mark of a conductor to make his orchestra perform at its best and program music for the enjoyment of everyone.

Rarely is it that a conductor can come into town and in three days of rehearsals have such an effect on an orchestra and an audience.



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