

Orchestra handles demanding program admirably

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

While there will always be some differences between a community orchestra and a major orchestra, the Birmingham-Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra is one that frequently makes us forget them.

The demanding program, culminating with the challenging *Symphonic Fantastique* by Berlioz, proved that this orchestra can tackle a complicated masterpiece and land on its feet, even if the position is wobbly at times.

The suite from the "Three Corners Hat" by de Falla radiated



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with a sense of fun together with substantial musicianship. This was the one popular selection in which the orchestra went substantially beyond the task of reproducing the notes — it retained much of the stylistic flavor.

AN UNUSUAL selection on this program was *Ballade for Saxophone and Orchestra* by French composer Henri Tomasi.

The soloist, Lloyd Porter, a winner in the Quest for Excellence series here in 1988, graduated from East

Tennessee State University. His dedication to this instrument is remarkable in the context that it is being used.

The saxophone in classical music, rather than in jazz, is extremely rare and it takes a true pioneering spirit to commit oneself to such venture.

While possessing such spirit, Porter seems to have talent to go with it. His technical skill on the instrument was enriched by his ability to mold its tone and make it match the musical context. Porter deserves recognition for such an unusual undertaking.

THE *Symphonic Fantastique*, which is a most challenging work even for a major orchestra, proved to be an extremely ambitious undertaking.

In absolute terms, when compared to a performance by a major orchestra such as the Detroit Symphony, this rendition was more impressive in terms of the effort than in final result.

The task of survival without falling apart was a major one, that didn't leave enough room for dynamic subtleties and meticulous phrasing. However, there were many positive aspects to this performance.

THE OVERALL balance was improved compared to the last time I heard this orchestra at Temple Beth El. Conductor Felix Resnick is well

aware of the pitfalls of the acoustics at Temple Beth El and he took care to see that the reverberating brass wouldn't overwhelm the strings, as it tends to do in this location.

The sound of the strings was good, with only occasional flaws in intonation. The solo parts were performed most capably. This was true especially of the English horn passages in the third movement.

If one is to take into consideration the fact that members of this orchestra earn their living in other professions, the level of this orchestra is remarkable.

The prevailing attitude in this orchestra seems to be toward achieving as much as possible under existing limitations, rather than using such limitations as an excuse for mediocrity.

Concert has universal appeal

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Artistic excellence is often the basis for national pride. The latest example was with the visit of the Warsaw Philharmonic at Orchestra Hall.

The event, part of the Guest Orchestras from Europe series under Detroit Symphony Orchestra Hall, DSOH, sponsorship, as expected drew many listeners from the Polish community.

The failure to draw more listeners from other ethnic or non-ethnic groups was disappointing, however. Those who view artistic events as strictly ethnic occasions rob themselves of the opportunity to be enriched by the best that art has to offer.

People of Polish origin have good reason to feel proud of the Warsaw Philharmonic and its conductor, Kazimierz Kord.

The language of music, however, is universal. This was reflected in the program itself, which featured works by Szymanowski, Rachmaninoff and Richard Strauss. The

review

soloist in the second Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto was the highly regarded Hungarian pianist, Zoltan Kocsis.

THE SHORT Scherzo-Tarantella by Szymanowski was the one Polish ingredient in this program, and was presented here as an orchestral arrangement by the Polish conductor and composer, Grzegorz Fitelberg. The rest of the program consisted of more familiar material.

The Rachmaninoff Second concerto, with its challenging technical difficulties, proved to be no serious obstacle to Kocsis, who, at 38, is among the eminent pianists of our time.

In fact, his tempi were substantially faster than that of most virtuosi tackling this concerto. While technically impressive, this bravura brought the call of duty was one of the drawbacks in this performance.

Kocsis did have ample dynamic variety in his playing and he managed to incorporate most of the nuances into the music in spite of the fast tempo. The orchestra, which was probably not used to the acoustic sensitivity of Orchestra Hall, was too loud in the first movement.

However, Kocsis managed to cut through the orchestral barrier with his energetic playing.

POSSIBLY, TIME was flowing more slowly for him than for the rest of us, as he seemed to be aware of the richness of the music. However, the pace was too fast for the rest of us to fully absorb it. There was certainly no need for rush in the second movement.

Few are those who could rush through the fugue in the final movement with such relentless accuracy. Kocsis is a pianist who, judging by his many recordings, is capable of showing his music, rather than his speed and technique. While a substantial amount of this quality was reflected in this performance, he is capable of more in this respect.

Strauss' "Don Quixote" proved the Warsaw Orchestra to be among Europe's finest. The combination of humor and sublime philosophy, which is depleted in this music, was reflected in this performance as well.

The character of Don Quixote came through shining with a sense of beauty, which surpassed the sense of naivete.

THIS WAS, in part, due to the principal cellist Kazimierz Koclas, who performed his demanding role with great distinction.

The singing quality of his tone with such a wide range of nuances, clearly established him as a cellist of the first order. The viola soloist, presumably principal violist Marek Marczyk, was impressive in his role.

The long, impassioned applause, elicited an encore from the opera "Halka" by the Polish composer Moniuszko. This was an appropriate Polish desert to a treat of a high international quality.

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