

ESO pianist destroys interpretation with a heavy foot

There were no new landmarks in last Sunday's program by the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra.

Dvorak's *Slavonic Dance in G Minor* was certainly rousing and it had a nice sense of syncopation, but it did not make the blood boil. Katharina Wolpe's interpretation of Brahms' *Piano Concerto in D Minor* left me feeling like I had heard some good ideas filtered through three layers of heavy towelling suspended somewhere in the middle of the hall. And the last number on the program, *Scheherezade*, by Rimsky-Korsakov, showed some exciting new touches, particularly in the pizzicato work, and Lawrence Leonard's sense of timing in his use of the pause, but failed to achieve greatness because of the coldness of Marguerite Marzantowicz's violin.

To get down to specifics, the Brahms concerto is one of the longest ever written, and one of the most difficult. It requires tremendous power and concentration from any pianist bold enough to tackle its vast, rugged expanse. Katharina Wolpe seems to know this and it seems to terrify her; but to pretend to the god-like state by hiding one's imperfections is a shoddy way to approach this music.

In short, Miss Wolpe tried to stamp out her mistakes with her right foot, and so slurred her interpretation out of existence. I believe an artist with the potential of Miss Wolpe should challenge the audience to forget the

errors with the *total effect of her interpretation*. As it was, she destroyed almost all she had to offer.

Another thing which can be distracting is stage mannerism. It is obvious Miss Wolpe had a strict upbringing at the keyboard, where, at an early age, someone told her to "keep your back straight, and keep your wrists level with the keyboard." Her posture is perfect, and her technique has gained from this sort of influence, but she has also decided

that the odd sweep and flourish at the end of a phrase is a good thing. Unfortunately her posture never relaxes, not for a second, and so the total effect is rather like a scarecrow attempting the ballet, with its ramrod body rooted to the ground and its arms floating in the breeze.

It seemed to me the first movement got away from Miss Wolpe and upset her enough that she didn't gain total control again until the final movement. But there were times when the

piece was most enjoyable. I particularly liked the ending of the first movement, and the last movement was a truly competent performance.

There is a hidden warmth in Miss Wolpe's playing and it shows at times. She will never be a pianist who seems to force the piano beyond its limits with passion. She is quieter than that, and I think better in the long run. Beneath the surface distractions of Sunday's performance there was a good pianist, with some good insights, and she has only to discover herself to be great.

Scheherezade is a little too corny and mushy for my tastes, but even so it was worth hearing. It gave us yet another demonstration of the phenomenal improvements right across the line in the ESO's horn section, particularly in the trumpets. If we could only hear the tape of the orchestra playing this piece a few years back and compare it to last Sunday's performance, the difference would be immediately obvious. The way Lawrence Leonard handled the dynamics in the pizzicato sections was delightful, and as much as I want to appear the cold, hard, rational, cynical and (why not?) evil critic, I was carried away in the excitement of the finale, "The Festival at Bagdad." It's not that I believe in fairy princesses or sleeping beauties all the time, it's just that it happens every now and then on certain Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons. —Brian Campbell



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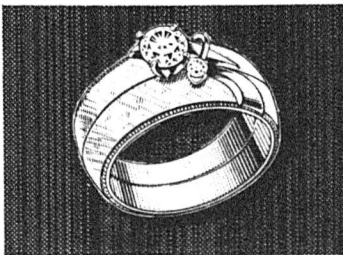
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