

ASO presents well-balanced treat at the Cohn

by M. Lynn Briand

The Atlantic Symphony Orchestra unveiled the theme -- works by Russian Composers -- in their opening concert of the "Great Composers Series." Monday night at the Rebecca Cohn, musical director Victor Yampolsky shared honors with Russian violinist, Victor Danchenko.

Unexpected in today's protocol, Steve Pederson, flutist in the orchestra, assumed the responsibility as commentator. Only lately has an elitist attitude snuck into the concert hall;

before the 20th Century, concerts were a much more casual affair. I hope creating a more relaxed atmosphere with commentary will destroy the stuffed-shirt image, bring the audience closer to the music. Pederson offered an insight into Russian composition, explaining the political and social bearings in writings and briefly examined the different musical techniques used.

The pieces chosen were enlightening of the various style changes within Russian repertoire, but were not fully suited to

the capabilities of the symphony. Perhaps Danchenko's selection of Sergei Prokofiev's "Violin Concerto No. 2 Op. 63 in G Minor" was a fine example of post Russian revolution music and an elaborate vehicle to display his secure technical ability, but it was far too difficult to be explored by the ASO. Danchenko gave it a sturdy, technically polished performance with secure intonation and consistent control.

The work itself was composed of many singular ideas surging forward. Interesting, but

difficult for an untrained ear to consume and the symphony to clarify, it tossed about conflicting moods.

The theatrical style and humorous writings common in Prokofiev remained hinted at, yet unsatisfied in the opening movements. Reaching the third, it blossomed -- remnants of the tango dance interjected, and flourishes of fun and foolishness sounded -- successfully offering colours and timbres, particularly from the thunderous basses and excellent tight percussion section.

Well-balanced, maintaining a drive, the orchestra hovered beneath the light and delicate passages of Danchenko, finishing humorously with horses clapping off in the distance. The ability of Danchenko shone in his creation of full sound (via an unusual vibrato) and ease in executing tricky passages. He remained an artist who did everything right, but left one feeling slightly cheated.

Redeemed by the other works, the evening was not a total fiasco. The conductor started the concert brilliantly with his interpretation of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's "Russian Easter Overture, Op 36." This was a tight performance; Yampolsky's choice of a slower tempo resulted in a greater impact and pungent performance. Desperately sad in melody, the Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise, Op. 34, No. 14" enraptured each listener. Accurately the rhythmical intricacies were

reaped with lament.

"Symphony No. 6, Op. 53" by Dmitri Shostakovich had one distinct advantage of not being one of the over-worked symphonies in the repertoire. Written in a time when music was often used for political expression in Russia, Shostakovich omitted the usual opening movement, avoiding any philosophical ideas against the regime. Totalling twenty minutes, the grueling long work emphasized talent -- both the orchestra's as an entity and individual's within the orchestra. Though off to a poor start, Elizabeth Dubois insured the audience of her sound technical ability and musicianship. Also among her ranks were, in general, the wind and brass section solos.

As the work progressed the ideas varied quickly and more lightheartedly. A delicate oboe entrance gave way to a deafening loud passage, only to be interrupted with airy interludes by the wind section. The humorous climb of notes closing the movement proved a slight indication of the fun to come.

Off to the races in the finale movement, the momentum was building, ignoring the occasional lag by the strings, to a majestic bomb of sound. Totally consumed by the music, Yampolsky's baton drew an overwhelming climax -- a regrettable conclusion.

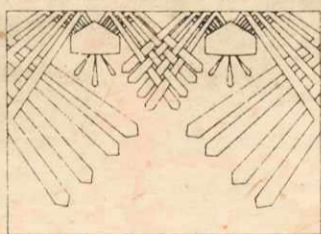
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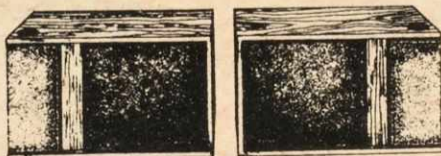
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