

Munich Symphony Makes Its Case for More Respect

Monday, October 24, 2005; C03

The Munich Symphony Orchestra has a tough time making a reputation outside the Bavarian capital, residing in a musically rich city home to such elite orchestras as the Munich Philharmonic and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. Yet the symphony's Saturday evening all-Beethoven concert at the George Mason Center for the Arts showed that, while it may not soon eclipse its more renowned counterparts, the ensemble certainly deserves greater attention.

The eminent French pianist and maestro Phillipe Entremont -- the orchestra's principal conductor since 2004 -- elicited a clear, agile sound from the group. Beethoven's overture to the ballet "Prometheus" was detailed yet forward-sweeping, and the orchestra infused a matching color, balance and rhythm into the Piano Concerto No. 4 in G, Op. 58. If the concerto missed a bit of the overture's tight coherence, that was most likely due to double-tasking of Entremont, who served at once as conductor and soloist.

Thankfully, occasional ensemble issues detracted little from the nobility of the outer movements or the lonely tenderness of the Andante. Entremont's splendid pianism combined intelligent phrasing, well-rounded intonation and elegant restraint.

The Munich Symphony played the Symphony No. 7 in A, Op. 92, with a sense of abandon. After an animated opening, a funereal Adagio and a scampering Scherzo, the finale was all manic energy and fire. Entremont and his orchestra conjured up a joyous whirlwind of sound that ultimately launched the music blazing into the ether.

-- Daniel Ginsberg

MUSIC REVIEW

Beethoven with respect and relish

BY DANIEL SCHLOSBERG

Daniel Schlosberg is a freelance writer.

October 24, 2005

What's in a name? When it comes to German orchestras, not as much as one would think.

While the celebrated Berlin Philharmonic rightfully takes pride of its place in the country's symphonic hierarchy, several lesser-known ensembles have graced the stage of the Tilles Center in recent seasons, with uniformly excellent performances. Such was the case Friday when the Munich Symphony - not the more famous Munich Philharmonic - offered an all-Beethoven program.

The orchestra, pared down to Classical-period size with a reduced string section, provided honeyed sounds all evening long. What's more, it displayed a physical and interpretive zealotry that one rarely encounters in most American orchestras.

The music master of ceremonies was Philippe Entremont, who soloed in the sublime Piano Concerto No. 4, in addition to conducting the Symphony No. 7.

Once one of the more recognizable names on the international piano circuit, the 71-year-old Entremont has in recent decades been less consistently visible, at least in the States. That's too bad, as he brought to the evening a rewarding, warm musicality, both on the podium and at the keyboard.

It's always a noble, self-effacing proposition to conduct a concerto from the piano bench. The pianist is turned away from the audience - all we see is his back - and the piano itself is pushed toward the middle of the orchestra, hugged by the instruments around it.

While it may not be the ideal acoustical setup, it engenders camaraderie between the orchestra and pianist that more than compensates.

Entremont did not present a provocative interpretation of the concerto, yet he commanded respect in every bar, not just from his luminous tone, but from his wonderful combination of buoyancy and earnestness. This was serious, wise Beethoven executed by a master with a skip in his step.

A similar approach, though with more mixed results, defined Entremont's performance of the Symphony No. 7, where he took to heart Richard Wagner's comment about the work being "the apotheosis of the dance." Tempos were zippy throughout, even if there was a bit of desultory daydreaming in the first movement. While the usually somber slow movement lacked gravitas, the alacrity became addictive in the last two movements, where Entremont's 92-octane approach more easily matched the spirit of the music.

Such playing of such a piece begs for an encore, and Entremont and his charges offered a substantial one, Beethoven's mighty "Egmont" overture, in another lean, galvanizing rendition.

MUNICH SYMPHONY. Philippe Entremont, pianist and conductor. Tilles Center, Greenvale. Attended Friday evening.

*OBSERVER-DISPATCH, WEDNESDAY, OCT. 26, 2005 **Local / State** 3B

Munich Symphony, piano soloist drum up lively, sleek sound

Pointing his seemingly long fingers at the musicians surrounding him, Philippe Entremont at the piano sat facing the Munich Symphony Orchestra to lead their accompaniment to Beethoven's Concerto No. 4 during the sections when he wasn't magnificently performing it.

Wearing his hats as conductor and soloist, Entremont swiftly glided through the keys in a delicate, yet powerful, rendition of the concerto that appeared more like a symphony.

The concerto was part of an all-Beethoven concert Tuesday performed for 1,552 patrons of the Great Artists Series in the Stanley Theatre. The offerings concentrated on the lively and vivacious portion of Beethoven, full of melody and cheer, rather than the ponderous parts of the composer, familiar in many works.

The Munich players, with Entremont at the helm, provided intense, exciting, sleek dramatic sound, where one could hear almost every instrument shaping notes clearly. Their excitement in playing was easily conveyed.

Like the rest of the program, the opener, the "Prometheus Overture" for the ballet "The Creatures of Prometheus," began slowly and deliberately before introducing a sway of jolly, moving sounds.

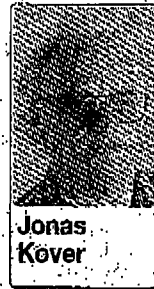
The concerto also began slowly with a brief piano announcement before the orchestra cheerfully entered.

A pleasing combination between pianist and orchestra, the concerto has a lot of seasoning, and enchanting sounds. It is an enjoyable piece that does not heighten the blood pressure.

The orchestra returned after intermission to play the composer's "Symphony No. 7," certainly not an "Eroica" or "Ninth," but one full of vibrant, danceable, toe-tapping tunes performed with verve.

As the last note resounded, the audience jumped up for a standing ovation almost as quickly as the string players fingered their instruments. They called Entremont back four times, before he led the Munich in one more Beethoven gem, the "Egmont Overture." The strings were fascinating.

The next Great Artists Series offering is Ballet Flamenco Jose Porcel on Nov. 17.



Jonas Kover

Jonas Kover covers the arts for the Observer-Dispatch.

Performance Date: October 25, 2005
Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute
Great Artists Series
Stanley Theater, Utica, NY

ENTERTAINMENT

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JOHN FRAYNE: REVIEW

Munich Symphony Orchestra dazzles



The Munich Symphony Orchestra, led by famed piano virtuoso and conductor Philippe Entremont, offered a

finely played program of great classical music on Friday night. The selections offered were quite familiar, such as Mozart's "Elvira Madigan" Concerto, but these pieces are, with one exception — Brahms' Second Symphony — not often encountered in local concert halls.

First, the name of this ensemble: The program stated that this orchestra was founded in 1945. If you cannot remember hearing the name before, it is because it was founded in 1945 as the "Graunke Symphony Orchestra," and it evolved into the "Munich Symphony Orchestra" in 1990. Collectors of recordings by the great German tenor Fritz Wunderlich will be familiar with the name "Graunke." This ensemble also played in many opera and operetta recordings.

What immediately struck me at the opening of the Weber "Oberon" overture was the

beautiful playing by the horns, and first hornist Mircea Ladiu took a richly deserved bow at the end of this piece. Conductor Entremont led a well-paced performance with unrushed final minutes.

How would you like to be a concerto named after a Swedish movie that no one has seen in 30 years or so? The naming of classical pieces is an unfathomable mystery, but one thing is clear: Names stick! Purists may rage about calling Mozart's Concerto No. 21 the "Elvira Madigan" concerto, but at least that name gives us a hook by which to catch it out of the jumble of our memories.

My memory of Philippe Entremont goes back to his performance of the Rachmaninoff Second Piano Concerto with the New York Philharmonic, under Leonard Bernstein in 1960 (a recording with these artists was made in February 1960). Entremont started conducting in 1970, and he has since led orchestras far and wide.

There was nothing miniature about Friday night's performance of the Mozart No. 21. While most of the winds and

brass left the stage after the "Oberon" Overture, all 41 strings stayed on stage. What riches! Entremont's playing was also large scaled, with quick and alert tempos in the opening movement. After that, the glorious slow movement shone forth in all its beauty. Entremont's piano entry was especially fine, and the dialogue of strings and woodwinds was lovely. In the finale, Entremont played with exciting dynamic contrasts. I do not know whose cadenzas were played, but they offered virtuoso extensions of Mozart's style.

The audience response at the concerto's end was strong applause. Frenchmen seem to like Brahms' Second Symphony. It was a favorite of Pierre Monteux. And the work seems to like French conductors in turn. The Munich Symphony played a songful and dramatic reading of the work. The splendid Munich horns were outstanding at the work's start and continued so throughout. The voicing of the final chord at the end of the first movement was especially fine. This was fol-

lowed by a tempest of coughs, and we thank all those folks for holding back until the movement's end.

In the third movement, the oboe of Uwe Stransky sang with an interestingly pungent tone, and the strings played memorably in the return of the main theme. The end of the finale was rousing, with a slight retard from Entremont, which increased its dramatic force. Some stood at symphony's end. The promise of an encore was in the air. What would they play? Something light, a Brahms Hungarian Dance?

No, Entremont and the Muencheners chose the heroic path, with Beethoven's "Egmont" Overture. The brass intoned the solemn introduction, and there followed splendidly forceful and disciplined playing. Clearly some best wine was saved for last. The overture ended with a whirlwind blaze of glory. And we offer a cheer for the piccolo player!

Entremont consulted the concertmaster about further playing, but the concertmaster, playing "bad cop," chose not to push the players into overtime. And what would not be a let-down after "Egmont"?

Posted on Wed, Nov. 09, 2005

MUSIC

Beethoven gains a few surprises Munich Symphony brings fresh excitement to a familiar piece STEVEN BROWN

The nimbleness and ring were just what Beethoven needed. Then the Munich Symphony added an extra spark. Suddenly, well-known music became fresh and even startling.

Beethoven's Seventh Symphony capped off the orchestra's program Monday for the Carolinas Concert Association, and the rejuvenations occurred again and again.

The players dug into the first movement's outbursts of joy with such gusto that the music all but whooped with excitement. Yet the precision held firm. That doubled the electricity.

Conductor Philippe Entremont and the group didn't always make their mark in so splashy a way. The full, deep sound of the lower strings gave the second movement's pensive little theme a surprising gravity. That didn't weigh things down, though. There was a touch of sweetness in the gentle string tone, and the gentle pulsing of the rhythm helped drive the music's gradual rise in intensity. And the players bore down there. But all of that was colored by the shadows of the opening.

When cheeriness returned in the third movement, the orchestra's lightness and agility let it scamper through with ease. Now the extra sparkle came from the zing of the strings' sudden crescendos and the breeziness of the woodwinds' interjections.

The more relaxed section didn't come off: Entremont sometimes stretched it out so that the rhythm practically came apart. But he and the players did spring back into action. And in the finale, the group plunged ahead with even more drive and abandon than it had in the first movement. The players were occasionally out of balance -- the brasses drowned out the fiddles at the start, for instance -- but the exuberance still came through.

For all the workout they got from that, the players seized just as eagerly on their encore, Beethoven's "Egmont" Overture. The strings' fire made the opening dramatic, not merely somber; the orchestra's agility and brilliant tone made the big finish blaze in a more heroic way.

At the concert's start, the gleaming and vital string playing energized Carl Maria von Weber's "Oberon" Overture. And the orchestra brought out the crossplay of turbulence and warmth in Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20. Entremont, directing from the keyboard, was more one-sided: His vigorous touch heightened the solo part's storminess but shortchanged the lyricism. Was he listening more to the orchestra than to himself? Steven

Brown

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TECHNIQUE

Munich Symphony Orchestra visits Ferst Center

By Haining Yu *Opinions Editor*

Strains of Beethoven graced the Ferst Center last Friday, as the Munich Symphony Orchestra came into town to perform under the direction of famed conductor and pianist Philippe Entremont. While the musical selection drew from some of Beethoven's lesser-known works, the performance was stunning nonetheless, highlighted by an impressive performance of the "Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58," in which Entremont acted as both conductor and soloist.

The program opened with the Overture from one of Beethoven's first ballets *The Creatures of Prometheus*. Energetic and lively, the Overture was a good selection to begin the evening with. It captured the audience's attention with its upbeat and moving melodies and was short enough to serve as a prologue for the rest of the evening. The overture gives the introduction to the auditory version of the Greek myth of Prometheus and the creation of man. In this tale, Prometheus shapes man and woman from clay and water and gives them the spark of life using a brand of fire stolen from the sun. While Prometheus is ultimately sentenced to eternal torture for his transgressions, the beings he creates are taken by the various gods to be educated into reasoning and feeling beings.

After a slightly irritating and unnecessarily long break in which the piano was moved around to the center position, the orchestra moved onto its second piece of the evening, the "Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58.

Entremont really took the center stage in this piece, both figuratively and literally, as he expertly acted as both the piano soloist and the conductor, playing the piano from the conductor's position. This duality of roles induced a strong dialogue between the solo parts and the rest of the orchestra throughout the whole piece.

Capping off this delightful evening of music was Beethoven's "Symphony No. 7 Played in A Major, Op. 92." First given during the height of the Napoleonic War, the piece was also written at one of the most difficult times of Beethoven's life.

The symphony begins with a resounding whomp and then draws the audience into a spirited yet light *Vivace*. The entire piece is impetuous to say the least; there are sudden shifts in mood, sometimes polarizing between light and dark motifs.

Listening to Beethoven's works is always an emotional experience—a glimpse into the troubled mind of a genius—and the orchestra did an excellent job of executing these shifts in feeling. The Allegretto feels of a slow dance or march with something ominous lying waiting just beyond the horizon, while the Presto immediately jumps out full of skipping and whirling joy.

The last movement, the Allegro con brio is probably the most famous, with its well known repeating motif. There is a palpable tension in the concert hall as the music climbs towards a bursting end.

The world-class orchestra drew an almost full house. "I would say it was captivating, thrilling and also moving," said Jerome Vasseur. "It was a great chance to welcome such a fantastic orchestra at Tech. I hope we will have more concerts like this one; I will definitely go back to such an event."

PalmBeachDailyNews

THE SHINY SHEET

Munich Symphony elicits beauty **Orchestra brings precision and sensitivity to Beethoven, Schubert; solos by winds and master pianist shine.**

By JOSEPH YOUNGBLOOD , *Special To The Daily News*

Thursday, November 17, 2005

The Regional Arts' Music at Two concert series at the Kravis Center launched its new season Tuesday afternoon with a solid performance by the Munich Symphony Orchestra.

With Philippe Entremont as conductor and piano soloist, the orchestra gave authoritative performances of works by Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert.

Founded in 1945, the Munich Symphony Orchestra is a relatively young orchestra by European standards. It is also relatively small — 40 string players as opposed to the 60 or so strings carried by many orchestras. The smaller string section was sometimes overpowered by the winds, causing the main musical line to be lost. But the orchestra played with great precision, flexibility and sensitivity.

The concert opened with the overture from the music Beethoven wrote for the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus, Opus 43*. The precision with which the orchestra played was apparent from the very first chord. The many wind solos were presented flawlessly and effortlessly. The tempo was brisk, and the winds, which were on risers, were clearly heard over the strings.

Entremont was soloist in Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 4 in G, Opus 58*. Because he also was conducting the orchestra from the keyboard, it was necessary to turn the piano toward the orchestra, with his back to the audience. Although this orientation facilitates communication between the orchestra and the soloist, it also reduces the clarity and the consistency of the piano sound.

Entremont is a master pianist, and he was completely in command of the virtuosic passages in the first and third movements and of the poetic, recitative-like passages in the second. The audience responded enthusiastically, many by standing and cheering.

The entire second half was given over to Schubert's *Symphony No. 9 in C, D. 944*, also known as *The Great C Major Symphony*. There is no denying that this is a long work; Tuesday's performance was clocked at 50 minutes. There also is no denying that there is a lot of repetition in this work; such repetition is a major part of Schubert's compositional technique. And, there is no denying that there are passages of great beauty, of great energy, of the most imaginative harmonies, of the most intense lyricism. The orchestra brought out all these features. The sound of the orchestra was enhanced by the addition of three trombones, which brought to the wind section a deep, rich sonority.

Particularly beautiful was the slow movement, dominated by an elegant oboe solo. The finale was quite animated — the orchestra members obviously were not affected by the length of the work. In fact, there is something life affirming in the fact that a work of such magnitude has remained in the repertoire for all these years, despite the many flaws that its critics find in it.

A note on the programming: The pieces featured were all written within a 27-year period and all come from the same city, in this case Vienna. On the orchestra's next visit, hopefully it will provide more varied programming.

