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Estimated printed pages: 2

Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)

January 13, 2001

Edition: Final

Section: Main News

Page: A2

BRUCKNER RIVETS CONCERT AUDIENCE

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Article Text:

Years ago, I was stuck in traffic on Nicholasville Road, and a Bruckner symphony started to play on the radio. It didn't matter which one; they were all alike: a mysterious swirling opening -- who knows what was going on -- followed by an hour of hyper-Romanticism. I sighed and settled back for a long stretch of road.

A while later, I noticed a noise amidst the sound of the engines -- a sort of quiet sobbing. I discovered the sobs were coming from me. That's how Bruckner works. The music catches you unaware and gets under your skin, speaking directly to your soul.

I was reminded of my introduction to Bruckner during last night's concert by the Lexington Philharmonic. Guest conductor **Ignat Solzhenitsyn** led Bruckner's Third Symphony without a podium, platform or score. Obviously a passionate champion of this repertoire, the conductor allowed nothing between him and the musicians. I'm surprised he used a baton, for I got the feeling he would have preferred to roll up his sleeves and dip his hands right into the music.

And what music! Bruckner is like nothing else. You expect the style of his idol Wagner, but it's nothing like Wagner. You think you'll detect Bruckner's background as an organist, but, no, you experience an original voice that inspired Mahler. And you haven't heard anything until you hear a symphony orchestra playing great unison walls of melody.

The Philharmonic presented three Lexington premieres, opening with a student piece by George Gershwin, his Lullaby. Originally written for string quartet, the work loses as much as it gains from

the expansion to string orchestra. The cantor-like solo lines disappear, and though the performance was intimate enough, the Philharmonic players weren't always of one mind when it came to intonation or interpretation. Some players casually slid into notes while others maintained a more classical style. It's a lovely little piece and seems to work best played straight; the dichotomy between Tin Pan Alley and the concert hall is best left to simply happen.

Solzhenitsyn conducted Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 17 from the keyboard. Another winning piece of music, it looks forward to Mozart's later *The Magic Flute*. Indeed, it's the concerto Papageno the bird man would play, if he could.

The orchestra maintained its light approach, but a touch of stridency from the winds and some heaviness in the strings kept the work from becoming airborne. **Solzhenitsyn's** piano part was more successful, bubbling along with airy grace.

The group's bold playing in the first movement of Bruckner's Symphony No. 3 riveted the audience. The second movement presented a sweeping landscape punctuated by glorious bursts of color, while the third movement surrounded a folksy dance section with forceful reminders of passionate emotion.

The final movement combined every technique that came before: mood shifts, fanfares, pizzicato strings, songs, straining ardor, silences. An extremely humble man, Bruckner revised his works many times -- usually whenever anyone suggested it to him -- so that several versions of the symphonies exist. The great strength of last night's reading by **Solzhenitsyn** and the Lexington Philharmonic was a commitment so strong that the listener never thought of another version. The performance was so right for the moment that we simply let it work directly on us.

Memo:

REVIEW

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Record Number: 0101150016