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A Bold, Outgoing Premiere at Davies

BY ROBERT COMMANDAY

It's a lift to hear musical growth in a musician, for the rewards in the listening and maybe because it's also symbolic — there's hope for us all.

Wednesday, continuing to show what a change in outlook can do, Edo de Waart conducted the San Francisco Symphony in a fine, up-spirit performance of Schumann's Fourth Symphony. Also, in its premiere, the new Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra by Charles Wuorinen came across in ways that confirmed its composer's newer, more outgoing and realistic voice.

The audience at Davies Hall too showed signs that it's coming along as well, giving the Rhapsody a respectful reception. The piece deserves much more and will earn it with additional performances as remarkable as Daniel Kobialka's. The orchestra's principal second violin is also a composer, and it was with him in view as soloist that the San Francisco Symphony commissioned Wuorinen's work. The Rhapsody has Kobialka playing almost continuously for its 20-minute duration, a tremendous virtuosic and musicianly performance.

For all the intricacy, Kobialka brings out a certain but *different* lyricism referred to in the program notes. There are some extended sections in broad, wide-ranging phrases, but much of the writing is far removed from anything in the traditional, singing or *cantabile* idea. The title rhapsody is relevant because of the impassioned energy and fantasy of some ideas and their unexpected bursting in on the proceedings.

I couldn't now begin to describe the work other than in terms of its effect — constant aliveness and purpose. Various ideas act like signals or penchants. Brief patterns flaring up in the solo trumpet and short and strident passages by the brass are examples of the attention-catchers, "Listen here!"

The orchestra does a lot of punctuating, gradually working up longer and more complex passages on its own towards an all-together final push to the end, strong and satisfying.

Wuorinen has produced a bold piece that comes out and addresses an audience assertively and origi-

nally. Earlier in his career, much of Wuorinen's music was gratuitously, self-consciously complex, to the point of obscuring structure and the larger expressive idea. His newer music still expresses a feisty and independent personality, the excellent craft is there, and it's still very involved. The difference is that the extraneous is gone. "Rhapsody" catches and holds the attention and plays to an audience.

De Waart and the orchestra gave a clean, connective, coherent performance of this challenging work. The achievement may even have had a positive energizing and focusing effect on the performances of Haydn's Symphony No. 97, in C, and the Schumann Fourth.

De Waart had the Schumann airborne, his tempos on the fast side, yes, but more important, he found the buoyancy of phrases that would touch down just enough to catch their breath and move off. He went for the big accents, not the meter, and encouraged taut rhythms and high energy. The sail was trimmed to a stiff breeze.

When you think you know your Haydn, and love the best of him, along comes Haydn 97 which, it turns out, you don't know as well as you had assumed. It's one of the last and great London symphonies, but perhaps because it isn't "tuneful" in the way we expect, it isn't played often.

Good. Keep it out for special occasions, like this bright, stylish performance.