
Review

Guest artists, symphony make beautiful music

By Owen Cramer
Special to the Sun

By a combination of good luck and adaptability, Maestro Charles Ansbacher and the Colorado Springs Symphony on Thursday night gave us one of the most enjoyable concerts I can remember. The luck was visiting composer Charles Wuorinen, in residence at Colorado College. The adaptability was in arranging a program in which Wuorinen, Ansbacher and cellist Lynn Harrell could all star.

The first half of the program was all Schumann: first his darkly romantic "Manfred" overture, literary to the core. Byron's hero "prayed for madness as a blessing" and conjured up his lost incestuous love before dying, a lonely Alpine Uebermensch, and Schumann represents all this unfulfillment in musical motifs the orchestra rendered well.

Then came Harrell to play the Cello Concerto in A Minor, also a conflicted work but simply glorious to hear in this lyrical performance. A large, nice man who plays the cello — so one thought as he came on stage. But as he launched into the songlike second movement it was clear to everyone this performer was doing special things. Even the last movement,

with its possibly trite development of a pleasant little theme, sparkled. Harrell's famous gift for ensemble work was clear as he nodded in time with the accompaniment, enjoying his fellow players.

This is the first of the big cello concertos to be written, and in this rendition it clearly deserves to be heard as much as Dvorak. Harrell picked up the thematic development trend from the Schumann last movement in his encore, the prelude to the first Bach suite.

After the intermission, Wuorinen's introductory statement seemed to disarm some apprehensions aroused by the formidable speakers by then installed on stage. And "Bamboula Squared" turned out to be, as he said it would, "fun." One always wonders why live musicians are willing to play against electronics. Here, the taped sounds were remarkably gentle and interesting — most of the time. Kind of a super Jewsharp going on steel drum, creating rhythms and clusters of sound that pleased in combination with the orchestral instruments.

Ansbacher then returned to lead the orchestra in Benjamin Britten's familiar but always enjoyable "Variations on a Theme of Purcell." Aside from sounding occasionally under-rehearsed, this went very well, and anyone who left the hall feeling bored had no excuse.

This concert was a triumph of programming. We had wonderful old German music, familiar to subscribers but played freshly and magnetically. We had also, in the Britten, something of a 20th Century light classic. And we had a work that was, in Wuorinen's delightful phrase, "born in June." It's obvious success augurs well for the musical future here.
