

Dohnanyi premieres new piece

By ROBERT FINN

MUSIC CRITIC

This weekend's Cleveland Orchestra concerts in Severance Hall are in important ways the most daring Christoph von Dohnanyi has yet attempted with our town's band.

They begin with the world premiere of a major new piece by the respected American composer Charles Wuorinen, a work commissioned from him by the Musical Arts Association as a kind of celebratory gesture for Dohnanyi's first Cleveland season.

The program (which is repeated tonight and Saturday) represents Dohnanyi's first entirely non-German program with the Cleveland Orchestra, and as such it is important in showing how he deals with music that lies outside the tradition in which he was nurtured. Besides Wuorinen's "Movers and Shakers," it involves pianist Michel Beroff in the Ravel G major concerto and in Messaien's "Oiseaux Exotiques," and it closes with the second "Daphnis and Chloe" suite of Ravel.

Wuorinen's piece is a kind of concerto for orchestra in six fairly short movements. In sound, it varies from hard-edged and proclamatory in the first and final movements to quietly beautiful in the second movement and here and there in several of the others. Virtually every first-chair player gets a solo opportunity, and there are showpiece sections for various massed sections, including ones for the

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percussion battery in the second and sixth movements.

The most interesting aspect of the piece, however, was rhythmic. Wuorinen built some very complicated orchestral textures but usually undergirded them with a steady rhythmic pulse that made itself prominently felt. Then after a while this pulse would shatter only to be succeeded by another, which would hold its own for a while and be succeeded in its turn.

The musical language is complex, but not so densely woven, for example, as that of Elliott Carter. Wuorinen has a good ear for orchestral sonority and is clever at mixing instrumental colors in arresting ways — sometimes using just a few solo strings, for example, in combination with one or more other orchestral choirs.

He is no tunesmith, preferring to weave his music out of short, trenchant motives rather than long lines. I was put off in some spots by the over-written percussion parts, but the piece held the interest continuously with its alternating moments of luminously orchestrated calm and energetic brilliance. Last night's night performance seemed assured, the audience was quite taken with the piece and Wuorinen beamed all over the stage when he took his bows.

good players can do when they have to. Any orchestra that wants to advertise its in-depth bench strength would be advised to investigate "Movers and Shakers."

Beroff gave a somewhat restrained, almost mellow-sounding performance in the Ravel concerto. There was talk in the program of the use of a brand-new Steinway grand, but I was assured at intermission that Beroff was playing the old Severance Hall Hamburg Steinway. In any event, the piece was done conscientiously enough but lacked the jazzy glitter that a more extroverted soloist might have brought to it. There were some trumpet problems, also.

Messaien's compilation of bird calls and exotic Greek and Hindu rhythms sounded different under Beroff's fingers. In fact, the bony clatter of Richard Weiner's xylophone solo part outshone Beroff's several big piano cadenzas. The playing of the small wind band was excellent, however, and the exotic little piece had its effect.

The concert ended with Dohnanyi's highly personal view of "Daphnis and Chloe." This involved extremely slow tempos in the slower sections and a kind of analytical approach instead of just letting the piece sweep you along on a cloud of sound. Everything was clearly articulated. The approach was restrained (until the final tumultuous dance) yet sensuous. It was a wholly different conception of this piece than any heard around here lately and brought a big ovation from the audience.