

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 portions, 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.

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Orchestra's greatness radiates again

By Donald Rosenberg
Beacon Journal music critic

If anyone needs to be convinced once again of the greatness of the Cleveland Orchestra, this week's program of 20th century works should do the trick.

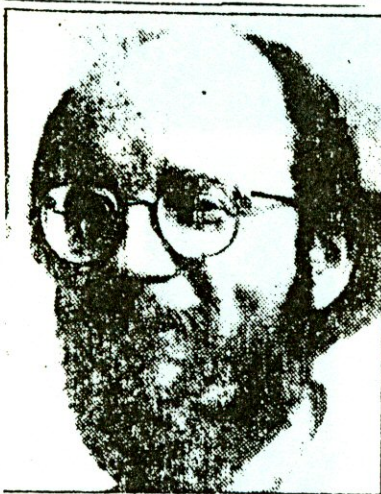
Every inch of the ensemble gets in on the act at some point during this program, which was offered for the first time Thursday night at Severance Hall with music director Christoph von Dohnanyi in charge. Much of the music requires extra troops in the percussion department, which puts in overtime and earns every penny.

The concert was a complete triumph in the evening's newest and oldest pieces, which opened and closed the program, tying the package neatly together.

The newest piece, Charles Wuorinen's splendid *Movers and Shakers*, is about as current as one can get, for here it received its world premiere. Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe, Suite No. 2*, the night's old friend, has rarely sounded better. Works by Ravel and Messiaen featuring the French pianist Michel Beroff rounded out the program.

The Wuorinen piece, the first commission of Dohnanyi's tenure, is a six-movement, 27-minute work "celebrating the players of the Cleveland Orchestra." The American composer has created an aural feast that focuses on the orchestra's solo, sectional and ensemble virtuosity.

Laid out symmetrically, *Movers and Shakers* is composed of pungent and colorful textures and instrumental lines that are clearly and forcefully deployed. There is never a sense, as in many contemporary works, that notes are being piled up to cover up a lack of ideas.



Charles Wuorinen

Wuorinen's score is a wide palette of expressive and sonoric devices based in an atonal idiom (though it occasionally hovers around tonal centers). Sometimes it screams in nervous fits, sometimes it sings with ethereal beauty.

The music's communicative power lies in its rhythmic vitality, its economy of gesture and its extremes of mood. The ear is always engaged by Wuorinen's alluring, startling shaping of materials and shimmering use of instruments.

Dohnanyi, who is eminently comfortable in works of such complexity, led the Clevelanders in a vivid performance marked by prowess in every department. The trumpets were especially impressive, and the percussion made brave sounds. Wuorinen came onstage to accept the warm response of an audience that doesn't always take kindly to such adventurous fare. The composer looked pleased.

At the opposite end of the program's spectrum was *Daphnis et Chloe, Suite No. 2*, in which Dohnanyi and his musicians seemed to revel in the sensuous and wild Ravellian textures. The perform-

ance was meticulously molded and lavishly executed, offering some of the most gorgeous sounds that have resounded in Severance for a long while.

Dohnanyi milked every drop from the climaxes, and he conveyed the amorous atmospheres in rapturously arching phrases. Jeffrey Khaner's flute solo was luminous. In all, a knockout performance.

There also were wondrous sounds to be heard in Messiaen's *Oiseaux Exotiques*, in which the composer weaves about 40 bird calls. The work, scored for solo piano, winds, brass and percussion, is made of a number of fluttery flights for the piano that flank or merge with whirring, chirping and chattering statements from the other instruments.

In the solo role, Beroff soared about the keyboard with utmost ease and elegance. Dohnanyi and his birds of many colors were always on top of their material.

Beroff's playing in Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G* was no less impressive technically, but it was glacial. The pianist took an unusually sober view of a score that brims with witty and sparkling ideas. Even in the long lyrical lines of the second movement, Beroff phrased with blunt detachment (Felix Kraus' English horn solo was lovely, however).

Dohnanyi set quick tempos in the outer movements that forced his players to race to stay in step. These were the only instances all night when the Clevelanders weren't able to rise to their usual lofty level.

The program will be repeated tonight and Saturday at 8:30. For tickets, call 231-1111.

Concert: San Francisco Symphony

By TIM PAGE

THE San Francisco Symphony, under the direction of its new music director, Herbert Blomstedt, played an uncommonly well-balanced program at Carnegie Hall Sunday night. In contrast to many visiting orchestras — who present the occasional rarity at home but trot out only the most familiar works in the repertory during New York visits — the San Francisco Symphony offered a largely unfamiliar masterpiece, "Tapiola," by Jean Sibelius; the first local performance of a challenging new work by the American composer Charles Wuorinen, "Movers and Shakers," and, finally, one of the few warhorses of which it is difficult to grow tired, Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 in A (Op. 92).

"Tapiola" began the program. This 20-minute tone poem, a musical evocation of the vast, unpeopled forests of the Finnish northlands, was the composer's last major work and, 60 years after its premiere, it retains an eerie power. It is pictorial music — a musical still life, of sorts — but hardly colorful: with its harmonic stasis and gray timbres, "Tapiola" is characterized by a bleak, poetic desolation, a mood broken only by the blistering depiction of a Northern windstorm in the last minutes of the piece.

Despite some hesitant attacks, Mr. Blomstedt and his forces delivered a vivid "Tapiola." The string sound

was full and rich, yet without any undue lushness that might compromise the composer's vision. The winds and brass alternately snarled and soothed over the thunder of the percussion; time stood appropriately still. Mr. Blomstedt led with spare, economical gestures. Orchestra and conductor seemed united in a quest for Sibelius.

And of all the century's great composers, Sibelius is probably the least understood. The reasons for this are obvious: unlike Schoenberg and Stravinsky, he founded no school, offered no formulas. Because his idiom combined Romanticism and neo-Classicism in such a personal manner, it was impossible for young composers to imitate. And, finally, he was an uneven composer who churned out a lot of trivial little pieces side by side with the masterly symphonies (his piano music, for example, is shockingly bad). We have a native suspicion of geniuses who take an afternoon off.

Still, 60 years after he stopped composing, Sibelius is an important influence on composers as diverse as John Adams, Ingram Marshall, Peter Maxwell Davies and, on the evidence of some recent works like "Prelude to Kullervo," Mr. Wuorinen.

"Movers and Shakers" is Sibelian only in its grandeur. Mr. Wuorinen, during an interview quoted in Michael Steinberg's program notes, recently observed that he had suc-

ceeded in curbing his "tendency to bang and crash." Not entirely — there are bangs and crashes aplenty, the piano part is aggressively percussive, and the entire score is punctuated by icy interpolations from the mallet instruments.

One admired Mr. Blomstedt's decision to play a new work that was not a premiere. It has become customary to commission a work, play it once and then relegate it to the scrap heap; the American composer Ralph Shapey once proposed a "Society for Second Performances."

Mr. Wuorinen has been and remains an articulate advocate of 12-tone composition, but his actual, sounding esthetic has changed. His music used to be chilly and desiccated, a hothouse product, wearing its dissonance as a spiky shield to dissuade all comers. Mr. Wuorinen's harmonic language is still uncompromising, but "Movers and Shakers" has passages of aching lyricism, and many moments of sheer, visceral excitement. This is a big, bustling work, teeming with energy and intelligence.

After such a challenging first half of the program, one slipped into Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 as into a comfortable bath. Mr. Blomstedt led a performance that began rather cautiously, with a slow, measured tempo in the first movement that seemed artificially restrained, and moved steadily toward the Dionysian effusion of the final Allegro con Brio.