

Brott offers steady-diet ex

By Maureen Peterson
Music and Drama Critic

Boris Brott is a great conductor.

There are some conductors I like to hear from time to time because I value inventiveness and originality. But those are virtues that can be over-exercised. Brott is steady-diet excellence.

There are some composers who work so well for certain conductors that I tend to link their names. But I will gladly listen to Brott play anybody. That is because he regularly presents us with a thoughtful view.

There are no lesser composers in his hands. He treats the good and the great with equal respect. No note readings on the one hand nor great diving expeditions into puddles on the other. He seems to plumb a work, sound its strengths, reason its structure and then let it play itself.

Had competition

As guest conductor with the NAC Orchestra Tuesday night he managed to turn Respighi's *Suite of Ancient Airs and Dances* into the most interesting, memorable and fully satisfying part of the program despite competition from a concerto for two pianos and a recent composition by Lothar Klein.

There is nothing flashy about Brott. He means business. He settles for nothing less than clarity and precision on the technical side and yet that is only the base of the performance.

He is a most harmonious musical personality, neglecting no aspect of musical performance, yet avoiding all excesses. In his hands Respighi's value was shown to its greatest advantage not overblown. It is not surprising that the audience responded by calling this guest conductor back for several bows. Brott was the star of the evening.

Lent sensitivity

The concert opened with Lothar Klein's *Prelude, Madrigal and Fantastic Spirits from The Masque of Orianna*, to which Brott lent his typical meticulousness and sensitivity. The works are not merely derivative; they are, as Klein himself acknowledges "recompositions."

Klein's thesis is that there is no such thing as progress in music, which is both profoundly correct and quite ridiculous. All composers draw on the past to some extent. Klein revels in the process. He is a man quite happy when digging his roots.

But to justify a composition by saying there is no such thing as progress anyway, seems more than moderately defensive. Of course his is new music even if it is only an arrangement or re-arrangement of old music. Has anyone done it before, or said it in quite the same way? No? Well then, that's progress.

There are no new musical elements, perhaps a debatable point, but certainly there is new music. This being said, the pieces were quite beautiful — Elizabethan-modernized in a very recognizably English

way. I think Klein is a better composer than he gives himself credit for. There is a lovely, refreshing vibrance to these works at any rate.

Guest soloists for the evening, Jane Coop and Adrienne Shannon, did not carry me away with their performance of Mendelssohn's *Concerto in A Flat for Two Pianos*. In fact, until the adorable ending, their reading was hardly an act of complicity. The ambiguous imbalance struck me as much a matter of differing styles as instruments or acoustics.

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