



MIKEY MUSIC

By MICHAEL QUIGLEY

It would be hard to come up with duller programmes than the Vancouver Symphony has performed this year in terms of content, but next year's concerts, recently announced, come pretty close to surpassing the current level of mediocrity.

Next season's programmes of those revealed (and all "subject to change") for the three serious music series — the 12-concert Main Subscription, plus the Great Composers and Musically Speaking, with four concerts each — contain an overall content of 60% Romantic music, an even higher amount than the current season's 49%, the highest amount of the five seasons since Kazuyoshi Akiyama first assumed the VSO conductorship. Akiyama, as music director, it was recently stated by the VSO's management, is ultimately responsible for the choice of the music to be heard.

Fans of the twentieth-century avant-garde next season will have a particularly rough time, assuming they have recovered from the shock of being deprived this season of the adventurous (but, alas, non-profitable) 20th Century Sound Trek, which was replaced by the low-brow musically appreciation series, Musically Speaking.

The 1976-77 programs contain such "modern" works as Stravinsky's *Fairy's Kiss Divertimento* (1928) and *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (1920) plus Bartok's 1938 Violin Concerto and Shostakovich's 9th Symphony (1945). Then, of course, there is a spate of "To Be Announced" Canadian works designed to placate the Canada Council's Canuck-content regulations and encourage their financial backing of the orchestra.

Addicts of Classical music will also find no fast, fast relief with the VSO next year. As far as this period goes, a miserable 11% of the total programming will be taken up with works by Haydn (one symphony, to be conducted by guest Neville Marriner), four by Mozart, and one by Schubert (his 3rd symphony). Pre-classical music thus far is represented by a single work by Gabrieli, for less than 2% of the total.

The lack of works from the Classical period at VSO concerts has become a particularly sore point with me recently, and I was extremely surprised to learn in this regard that Mozart was "Akiyama's favorite composer" (so were several VSO musicians when I told them this). I was even more surprised to learn that the lack (or neglect) of Mozart over the past five seasons was a result of Akiyama's opinion that the Queen Elizabeth Theatre's acoustics were unsuitable for the performance of this composer's works.

I'd like to rather humbly suggest here that surely the decision of whether or not certain works will be performed by the VSO shouldn't be determined by what the Maestro wants, but what the orchestra *needs*. There is no point, after all, of utilizing the services of musicians, many of whom have spent considerable time and effort studying and performing music written before 1800, to play the same old Romantic warhorses over and over.

There have been several examples at recent concerts of the deterioration of the VSO's performance standards as a result of this programme imbalance. One of these was the fourth ren-

dition of Brahms' 2nd Symphony in nine seasons, which was not that much of an improvement over the last of these four years ago, conducted by Akiyama himself. And then there was a performance of Mozart's Divertimento No. 17 for horns and strings which was embarrassingly bad as far as the first violins were concerned. Inadequacies such as these really make me laugh at those who consider the VSO level of performance to be of "international" quality.

All this negativism aside, there are a few items of interest on next year's programmes, aside from the presence of Marriner, mentioned above. Isaac Stern will play the Bartok Concerto and the Tokyo String Quartet will join the orchestra in Louis Spohr's Quartet Concerto, a rarely heard item. As well, Akiyama will finally get around to conducting some Schumann (the Rhenish symphony) and some Schubert other than the "Unfinished".

On the other hand, we will hear the third Akiyama-directed performance of Respighi's bombastic *Pines of Rome*. There will also be no less than six works by the composer who I would have guessed Akiyama's favorite, judging by his championing, *ad nauseum ad infinitum*, of his works: Richard Strauss, who will be represented by the blatant autobiographical *Symphonia Domestica* as well as some relatively unfamiliar works. The orchestra will also waste their time attempting yet another of the massive symphonies of Anton Bruckner — his 9th. The 60-plus minutes devoted to this work could be more profitably put to use by performing three or even four pieces of Classical or Baroque music.

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One of the highlights of the Vancouver musical scene over the past several months has been the Vancouver East Cultural Centre's new Masterpiece Music series. Public response to the concerts presented so far has been nothing less than overwhelming, with turn-away crowds the rule rather than the exception.

Unlike the "other" chamber music series in Vancouver — Friends of Chamber Music, which features only imported ensembles — Masterpiece Music draws on the resources of many local musicians, focusing largely around the talents of pianist Linda-Lee Thomas (who serves as director of the series) and Simon Fraser University's resident ensemble, The Purcell String Quartet.

The overall level of performance at Masterpiece Music has been very satisfactory thus far, with highlights including interpretations of Debussy's String Quartet, Beethoven's Piano Trio, Op. 1, No. 1 and Schumann's Piano Quintet. Audience enthusiasm being such as it is, plans are already afoot to expand the number of programmes next season.

In addition to their duties here, the Purcell Quartet, by the way, is as peripatetic as ever. Following two Masterpiece Music concerts in April, they will be performing at the Habitat Festival in Vancouver in June and will be the only B.C. musical group represented at a festival connected with the Olympics in Montreal in July. As well, they will be in residence at the Courtenay Summer School of Music, and will be recording the Schumann Quintet for the CBC, again with Ms. Thomas.