

FLINT SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CONCERT, OCT. 10, 2009
REVIEW BY LAURENCE E. MacDONALD

To begin his 21st season as music director of the FSO last Saturday, maestro Enrique Diemecke chose an eclectic mixture of music from the 19th and 20th centuries. The result was a very rewarding concert that contained both familiar and unfamiliar music.

The first work on the program was Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" Overture-Fantasy. While not as familiar as his beloved ballet score for "The Nutcracker," this long single-movement work still contained a couple of themes that could be considered among the composer's "greatest hits." The first of these is the dynamic feud theme, in which the entire FSO came together under Diemecke's expert direction to produce a thrilling sound. The other, the slower-paced love theme, featured the strings and horns in a lyrical blending of tones.

Ever attentive to the work's vast number of dynamic shadings, Diemecke led the FSO in a thrilling performance that was keenly appreciated by the nearly full house at the Whiting.

The most famous of Beethoven's nine symphonies, the Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, provided the audience with a dazzling display of musical drama. Although the ensemble was a bit shaky during the opening, with its famous four-note motive, the level of playing quickly improved, and soon achieved a high degree of polish. The string section, under the always capable leadership of concertmaster Andrew Jennings, set a high standard of achievement during the opening movement, and continued to excel throughout the work's three other movements.

The long second movement, with its variation-form structure, provided some of the concert's most beguiling musical highlights. The FSO violas and cellos began with a soft statement of a simple theme that was played exquisitely. This was soon followed by a loudly pronounced second musical idea that featured the entire ensemble in a tightly controlled tempo, with the majestic sound of trumpets echoing throughout the hall.

There were many more delights in the remaining sections of Beethoven's masterpiece, including deftly played string pizzicatos in the work's third movement, and a joyous sound by the entire orchestra in the jubilant finale.

Using no printed score, Diemecke brilliantly led the FSO throughout the Beethoven symphony, which ended the concert in exciting fashion.

Earlier in the evening Diemecke led an enchanting performance of a very recent work from 1998, the Concerto for Marimba and String Orchestra by German composer Eckhard Kopetzki. As soloist, Mexico native Saul Medina performed very capably a series of astonishingly agile passages in which he played with two mallets in each hand.

Among the most memorable moments were several soft moments in which the solo marimba was accompanied by only a single instrument. Involved in these passages, which occurred during the work's slow second movement, were violist Steven Kruse, cellist Judith Vander Weg, and especially violinist Andrew Jennings, whose sweetly lyrical tones blended beautifully with Medina's delicate marimba sounds.

Medina excelled throughout the many fast passages in Kopetzki's concerto, which contains little to jar the ears of the first-time listener. In fact, this harmoniously pleasant work deserves a place in the standard orchestral repertoire, even though the marimba has until now been a rarely used solo instrument.

In all, Saturday's performance provided a stellar example of Diemecke's conducting prowess, and of the FSO's high degree of capability. If the rest of the 2009-2010 season features music-making on the same exalted level, this should be a year of innumerable musical delights.