

Jacksonville ensemble sets a state standard

By Bill F. Faucett

Special to The Palm Beach Post

WEST PALM BEACH — The Sunshine State is home to four important orchestras: Tampa's Florida Orchestra, Miami's New World Symphony, our own regional Florida Philharmonic Orchestra and the Jacksonville Symphony.

To the extent that any of them tours at all, they rarely tour within the state. That leaves concertgoers only to imagine what the orchestras outside their own region sound like. And it is practically impossible to know how one's hometown orchestra stacks up against the others.

From what I heard Monday evening at the Kravis Center, the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra, led by conductor Fabio Mechetti, is the standard to which all other Florida orchestras should strive.

I was sold from the beginning. Aaron Jay Kernis' lively *Too Hot Toccata* (1996) showcased a disciplined, brilliantly rehearsed ensemble, bright in its overall tone quality and exceptionally precise in its interpretation of rhythm. While Kernis' music is a forgettable little flourish, the orchestra's performance of it was superb.

It is hard to imagine a better performance of Dvorak's *Sym-*

Concert review

phony No. 8 in G-Major (Op. 88)

The strings, the orchestra's great strength, imbued the composer's melodies with a sumptuous richness and sonority. The brass and woodwind section were very impressive, but this may be the best violin section to play on the Kravis stage this year.

The evening's featured soloist was French hornist Eric Ruske, who is well known among brass aficionados for his inspired service with the renowned Empire Brass Quintet. Ruske brought his dark, mellow tone and an unsurpassed technical ability to bear on Richard Strauss' *First Horn Concerto (Op. 11)*. Ruske's intonation was nearly flawless, his sound was always clear, and he gave the piece a fine Mozartian lilt.

Mechetti is a workmanlike conductor. His choreography is controlled and he has the constant attention of his forces. None of his interpretations were particularly revelatory, but his grasp of the music was firm and the expression was convincing.

Following a surprisingly tepid response to the first half, the audience warmed up to the group by the concert's close. This orchestra undoubtedly will be welcomed back with open arms.