

REVIEW

Seaman's Classic II performances need more impressionist color

A broad spectrum of musical ideas and textures was in order Thursday evening at the Philharmonic Center for the Arts, but it was a bit of an "off night" for Christopher Seaman and his Naples Philharmonic musicians.

In the first performance of the weekend Classics II programs, the performers were called on to produce the subtle impressionist sounds of Debussy and Ravel, along with a performance of one of Mozart's horn concertos that has almost become a cult classic. (The final performance is at 8 tonight.)

The melodious "Concerto for Horn No. 4, in E-flat major," well-known for its good-natured finale that includes a succession of hunting-horn sallies, was played with panache by guest artist Eric Ruske. The orchestra was at its best when accompanying Ruske in the concerto, which was written for one of the composer's closest friends, horn virtuoso Joseph Leutgeb. Ruske performed the concerto's surprisingly majestic first movement with enormous

poise and a straightforward honesty that was very appealing.

But at Thursday's concert,



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Debussy and Ravel works seemed to lack the tonal nuances we have admired from other readings.

The colorful work "Iberia," from Debussy's three-part work "Images," opened the concert. Like Bizet, another Frenchman who had never visited Spain, Debussy created music that is redolent of the country he knew only through paintings and books. The score is pervaded by sensuous dance rhythms with the use of castanets and tambourines to heighten the orchestral colors.

Certainly, at times the orchestra responded with appropriate passion, especially in the sultry "Les Parfums de la Nuit" ("The Perfumes of the Night"). But just as often, Seaman and his players seemed disconnected and passive.

The musicians of the Naples Philharmonic have consistently demonstrated their growing

range of tonal quality and mood with sonorities that are exceptional for such a young orchestra. So one can only say the next two performances of the same program progressed from earth-bound to earth-shaking.

Ravel's "The Mother Goose Suite," which was also performed at the Phil earlier this week by the Labeque piano duo, provided a pristine aural journey through a child's world of enchantment to meet Sleeping Beauty, Tom Thumb and even the Empress of the Pagodas. The gentle, jewel-like melodies give the work a luminous quality, and the players, under Seaman's direction, succeeded in catching the delicacy of Ravel's dream world.

The program concluded with another Ravel favorite, "La Valse," a sumptuous work of high-powered, glittering waltzes. Drenched in atmosphere, the work has also been described as a musical master's bittersweet reminiscence of a lifestyle that was destroyed by World War I. Little by little, Seaman's interpretation began to take fire in this piece, and it ended as an intoxicating whirl of symphonic frenzy.