

Florida Orchestra reaches high level of momentum this week

By KURT LOFT
Tribune Music Critic

TAMPA — Rather than wait another five or six years to form a perfect union with its new music director, the Florida Orchestra already has done it.

The presence of Jahja Ling, who took the podium this season, and a maturing artistry among the ranks add life to this once-dreaded orchestra, and never has its playing been on such a consistently high level.

Ling, who also serves as resident conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra, directs his fifth formal program this week and leaves no doubt about the music's drive and direction.

His musicians sound alert and enthusiastic, often playing on edge, as if each had just won the lottery and a world tour.

Thursday's concert at the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center featured a fresh and rock-solid version of Dvorak's Symphony No. 9, "From the New World," a piece often bowled over and beaten, and two glowing performances by guest artist Eric Ruske on the horn.

Concert Review

THE FLORIDA ORCHESTRA

- Who: Eric Ruske, horn; Jahja Ling, conductor
- When: Sunday at 8
- Where: Bayfront Center, St. Petersburg
- Tickets: \$11.50-\$18.50; (813) 221-2365

Ling flexed his tempos in the Dvorak and drew a rich broth of color from his string section.

His view of the symphony as a whole remained taut and secure, with dynamics in place rather than thrown around for dramatic effect.

The orchestra was superb in the largo — with its famous "Goin' Home" melody — helped by the poise of Joyce James' English horn.

Ling jumped around the podium through the frolicking finale, which seems to mimic stampeding horses at one point, and the conductor shuffled back and forth in obvious

delight of what he was creating. For those keeping records, this was the orchestra's fourth performance of the "New World" in 15 years.

Ruske, a 24-year-old virtuoso who also worked with the Cleveland Orchestra before embarking on a solo career, could be described best as an understated artist with a rich, mellifluous tone and ideal phrasing. Ruske has a seamless style, warm and bell-like, shapely and often stately.

His faultless intonation and ability to etch the long line in Mozart's Concerto No. 4 in E-flat major gave the piece a singing, lyric quality — yet almost forlorn.

Ling smiled patiently as the long-haired Ruske cleaned his horn between movements, removing a slide and blowing through the tubing. Horns collect condensation in their snake-like plumbing that can disrupt a legato line, so care must be taken to clean them, usually in front of an amused audience.

Ruske returned and waxed virtuosic in "Villanelle" by Dukas, of "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" fame — a sprightly gem of a work seldom



Hornist Eric Ruske performs Mozart and Dukas this week-end.

heard in concert.

For sheer beauty of sound, Suite No. 1 of Respighi's "Ancient Airs and Dances" hardly can be surpassed, and Ling put just the right touches throughout to make it sparkle and sing.

Put the orchestra, reduced for a chamber sound, takes the cake here. Its delicate treatment of phrases, softly shifting rhythms and an almost glowing transparency added a real magic to the music.