

ERIC RUSKE, FRENCH HORN

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By WILMA SALISBURY
DANCE/MUSIC CRITIC

The Ohio Chamber Orchestra performed an all-Mozart concert at the Cleveland Play House Drury Theater yesterday to initiate a two-year focus on the composer's music leading up to the 1991 bicentennial of his death.

The pleasing program consisted of four works written between 1786 and 1788: Overture to "The Impresario," K. 486; Adagio and Fugue in C minor, K. 548; Horn Concerto No. 4 in E-flat, K. 495; and Symphony No. 38 in D major, K. 504 ("Prague"). Music director Dwight Oltman conducted. Eric Ruske was the horn soloist, and his splendid performance was the high point of the afternoon.

At age 28, Ruske has already completed four years as associate principal horn of the Cleveland Orchestra. An exceptional talent, he has won several international competitions, including the 1986 Young Concert Artist International Auditions in New York. Since leaving the orchestra last season, he has traveled the world as a solo artist giving concerts, recitals and workshops.

Ruske's interpretation of the delightful Mozart concerto was a model of purity and poise. Completely relaxed onstage, he played with beautiful tone and effortless technique. Sensitive and involved, he approached the music like a fine singer with endless breath control and a wide palette of dynamic shades.

MUSIC OHIO CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

ings. Except for a small stumble in the first-movement cadenza, his performance was flawless.

In the opening allegro, Ruske gave the impression that he was having great fun with Mozart. He played the romanza with lovely lyricism and captured the carefree spirit of the rondo finale. In the hunting horn themes, he balanced the exquisite refinement of chamber music with the lusty character of a call to the hunt.

So engaging was Ruske's performance and so enthusiastic the audience's response that a reprise of the rondo was offered as an encore. Still fresh, Ruske added an extra punch at the bottom of the cadenza, and the audience appreciated the musical joke.

Oltman kept the orchestra a little more restrained than necessary for balance. But the ensemble played the concerto with crisp clarity and festive feeling.

The program opened with the dramatic contrasts of the sunny "Impresario" overture and the dark-hued adagio and fugue for strings. The sound of "The Impresario" was almost as bright as the lights in the ceiling of the unattractive white orchestra shell. Although the timpani was occasionally overly enthusiastic, the ensemble's balance was generally excellent, the tempo brisk and the phrasing graceful.