

Featured French Hornist Brings Elegant Techniques to Concert

By David Noble

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Tuesday's concert by the Chamber Orchestra of Albuquerque had two spectacularly successful ingredients — a dazzling performance of two classical showpieces by guest

REVIEW

French hornist Eric Ruske and a realization of a major American symphony that accumulated overwhelming, transcendental power.

Ruske's triumphs came in works composed just before and after the turn of the 19th century, W.A. Mozart's Fourth Horn Concerto and the Horn Concertino by Carl Maria von Weber, respectively. The soloist played Mozart's late-Classical work and Weber's early-Romantic showpiece with Romantic breadth of phrasing and deliciously light and transparent tone. He once was the associate principal hornist of the renowned Cleveland Orchestra, and he is a wonder to hear.

The elegance of his understated, Neo-Romantic style carried the Mozart performance, which got a bit muddy at times in the orchestra. In the Weber work, an unpretentious but cruelly difficult display vehicle for its soloist, Ruske played with breathtaking deftness.

His performance was so super-competent it was almost a relief to hear him muff one tiny turn of the music. And the orchestra achieved exemplary clarity of sound.

Before each of these Germanic delights, conductor David Oberg presented a core classic of the



Eric Ruske

"... Breathtaking deftness ..."

American symphonic literature. Opening the concert before Ruske came out to play Mozart, the Hymn and Fuguing Tune No. 2 by Henry Cowell had a vibrant, Romantic beauty heightened by gentle Modern touches in Cowell's writing. The Fuguing Tune, a flowing movement in an imitative form used by Colonial New England composers, soared with rare exaltation set off powerfully by rich, unified tone among the orchestra's strings.

After intermission the spiritual center of the concert came in the Third Symphony by Charles Ives, who for many listeners is the towering master among American composers. Titled the "Camp Meeting" symphony, this work first sketched around the turn of the century with

a belated Pulitzer Prize in 1947.

Oberg and the COA used a recent edition of the symphony incorporating dissonant elaborations the composer added during or after World War I. Originally written as a group of organ preludes for a fashionable Manhattan church, this complex, mystical music gained sharp, dissonant edges and even greater depth in the revisions.

Its first movement, "Old Folks Gatherin'," draws clouds of nostalgic harmony so sharp that they sometimes hurt. The up-tempo second movement is titled "Children's Day," the incomparable, stately finale is a "Communion."

The harmonic and rhythmic complexities of this mostly fluent music grow out of patches and tissues of tunes quoted from New England life — hymns, marches and children's songs. Many still are familiar to present-day ears. These found musical objects resonate inside Ives' symphonic web to create strong pathos and merriment.

The orchestra had some problems with the "Old Folks" movement, pushing dissonances harder than necessary in many places and in a few simply going out of tune. The bright, shallow acoustics of St. John's United Methodist Church did not ease these difficulties, and neither did a slow tempo set by the conductor.

The brisk, pointed performance of "Children's Day" that followed had a crisp energy that highlighted the music's electric playfulness.

And then, in the "Communion," conductor and orchestra settled into the far-reaching mysteries of Ives' cosmically meditative finale.