

French horn player Ruske latest gem to appear with symphony

By Larry T. Collins
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At Saturday's Springfield Symphony concert, French horn player Eric Ruske added yet another pearl in the string of impressive soloists to appear during conductor Apo Hsu's inaugural year.

Following a lineup as impressive as Eddie Daniels, Juliette Kang, Thomas Stacey, Nestor Torres and Fabio Bidini is not easy, but Ruske made his mark in a sovereign performance of Rheinhold Gliere's demanding "Horn Concerto in B flat Major."

The 1952 work offers full-bodied if undistinguished tunes for the orchestra, but serves well as a showcase for the unwieldy French horn. Ruske displayed technical virtuosity in his lip slurs over large intervals and his seemingly effortless breath control, allowing him to sustain the lengthiest of phrases.

His cadenza in the first movement, with his right hand serving as a stop in the instrument's bell,

was dazzling in its range, deployment of sound effects and articulation in fast passages. His bright sound in the upper registers was especially pleasing.

Ruske's technical mastery allowed an expressiveness not always heard on the French horn. His musicality, along with a winning stage presence and good looks, proved a potent combination.

The orchestra's showcase was the evening opener, Walter Piston's delightful suite from his ballet, "The Incredible Flutist." Combining lyricism with Continental elegance and American humor, the piece allowed all sections of the orchestra to make a vivid impression.

The lovely, sultry tango section was a highlight, as well as the raucous brass band march that culminated in wild yells and a couple of barks courtesy of the game orchestra members. Flutist Larry Bridges was suitably seductive in his several solos.

The program concluded with Beethoven's "Symphony No. 5 in C Minor." Just as it is hard to look at

the Mona Lisa and see either a painting or a woman instead of the cultural artifact, so does Beethoven's noble work face the barrier of over-familiarity.

Still, the orchestra offered a solid, workmanlike reading notable for the sustained forward momentum of the famous first movement. The brass were sturdy throughout, while the woodwinds captured an 18th-century elegance which contrasted nicely with the stormier Romantic passions expressed by the strings.

Once again, however, the concert proved most gripping in the 20th century works. Perhaps all-American programs of Piston, Diamond, Hanson, Schuman or Barber will surface in future seasons.

The current season concludes on a high note May 11 with a pops concert featuring Springfield native Kim Crosby singing a variety of Broadway show tunes. For tickets, call 864-6683.

Larry T. Collins is music reviewer for the News-Leader.