

Exuberance drives Schubert celebration

By WILMA SALISBURY

PLAIN DEALER MUSIC CRITIC

The Ohio Chamber Orchestra celebrated Franz Schubert's 200th birthday by giving a dynamic performance of excerpts from the Viennese composer's Incidental Music to "Rosamunde." But the high point of the orchestra's concert Saturday night at Cleveland State University was an affecting interpretation of Benjamin Britten's 1943 masterpiece, Serenade for Tenor Solo, Horn and Strings, Op. 31.

The imaginatively planned program opened with the springtime sounds of "Three Botticelli Pictures" by Ottorino Respighi and closed with the jump-for-joy exuberance of Wallingford Riegger's "Dance Rhythms," Op. 58.

Music director David Lockington gave the ensemble vibrant leadership, and the players responded with first-rate musicianship. Guest soloists were tenor Quentín Quereau, music faculty member

Britten's Serenade, a profoundly moving work, matches exquisite music to elegiac English poems about night and death. The horn provides poetic commentary and frames the texts with an unaccompanied prologue and epilogue (played offstage). The strings play a radiant supporting role.

Ruske, an internationally acclaimed horn soloist and faculty member at Boston University and Tanglewood Institute, brought commanding technique and insightful artistry to his part. By pushing melodic dissonances to the edge, sliding to resolutions, coloring his tone and subtly shading dynamics, he made the horn speak as eloquently as the human voice.

Quereau's singing sounded effortful by comparison, and his tone was sometimes quavery. But his experience and artistry brought him through. A versatile veteran of opera, oratorio, early music and art song, he connected with the intensity of the work and clearly communicated its meaning.

Lockington and the strings were sensitive partners, breathing with both soloists and showing respect for their individuality.

Schubert's "Rosamunde" excerpts sounded slightly archaic on the program of 20th-century pieces. But Lockington's selection of two entr'actes followed by the overture was creative, and the performance was wildly energetic. Although the melodramatic episodes sounded overblown, lyrical passages were played with grace and familiar themes were sung like songs without words.

Riegger's "Dance Rhythms," the perfect closing piece, resounded like a jazzy American hurrah for the program of European concert music. The performance was jubilant. The brass sounded terrific.

The audience brought back Lockington for repeated bows, and the players joined in the applause for their personable conductor.

MUSIC REVIEW

Ohio Chamber Orchestra

at Case Western Reserve University, and French horn virtuoso Eric Ruske, former associate principal horn of the Cleveland Orchestra.

A fine performance of the Respighi work set a buoyant mood. The gently scored triptych evokes the sweetness and shimmer of three famous paintings by Botticelli. Sparked by Lockington's uplifting direction, the orchestra sounded fresh in "Spring," serene in "The Adoration of the Magi" and sensuous in "The Birth of Venus." The wind soloists outdid themselves, and the full ensemble produced warm sonorities that bloomed in the lively acoustics of Waetjen Auditorium.