



Jeff Clemens

'Forever Young' revives brilliant compositions

Conductor Michael Stern and the Naples Philharmonic succeeded in making us all feel inadequate Thursday night.

The "Forever Young" program included early works from Sergei Prokofiev, Richard Strauss and Ludwig Van Beethoven. Each one of these men were giants in their field at a youthful age and still are today.

What were you doing when you were 18?

Richard Strauss was composing his "Horn Concerto No. 1 in E-flat, Op. 11." French hornist Eric Ruske helped Stern and the orchestra interpret the piece Thursday in sublime fashion.

Ruske, who 11 years ago claimed first prize in the American Horn Competition, played as if the next breath will be his last. The deep-red strain on his face was flush with emotion, as was his playing.

Strauss' concerto shows him still holding on to some of the classic forms he would later break free from in the Wagnerian tradition. His father, who hated Wagner, was principal horn of the Munich Opera, so Strauss knew the instrument as well as any.

Ruske swam through the concerto smoothly, effectively dramatizing the subtle shifts of the solo elements.

A short encore took the completely opposite tack, allowing Ruske to demonstrate his serious technique and impressive chops.

Stern took control of the evening immediately in Prokofiev's "Classical Symphony, Op. 25." It is obvious he enjoys his work, seeming to physically pull the light staccato violin notes out by sheer will.

The "Classical Symphony" was written in 1916-17, during a time of political upheaval. But Prokofiev steered clear of the impending revolution, preferring to write a piece based on the works of Joseph Haydn.

The finale remains the symphony's most brilliant passage, and Stern was able to draw an impressive string sound out of the orchestra, although it was slightly top heavy. Much of the tone and volume of the violins emanated from center stage, while the projection tailed off further stage right.

In both the Prokofiev and Beethoven symphonies, the woodwinds were impressive. Particularly in Ludwig's "Symphony No. 1 in C Major, Op. 21," the woods defined the wit and light mood of the piece.

Beethoven was roundly criticized for his first symphony work by listeners who found contradictions in the piece they weren't used to hearing. But modern audiences see shades of what the future held for Beethoven. While his emo-

See CLEMENS, Page 3B

Clemens

Continued from 1B

tional world-shaking style was in its infancy, there were clear signs he was ready to break the mold.

Stern "seemingly" understood this, presenting the music in a way that highlighted the beautiful, classical-sounding theme

while still building the underlying tension that upset Beethoven's contemporaries.

The only real disappointment of the evening was a less-than-capacity crowd. The Discovery Series featuring Stern was sold apart from the rest of the Classical and Symphony & Splash series, and it seems to have hurt sales. More people should have been there to see a splendid interpretation of these composers' earliest works.