

Symphony celebrates music of the century

BY TIM LINDEMAN
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CONCERT REVIEW

The Greensboro Symphony Orchestra ushered in the new year with a program devoted to 20th century music. I'm happy to report that there is much to celebrate about the music of this century, which in the GSO's hands, sounded alive and well and plenty accessible.

The evening opened with a ballet suite from Walter Piston's "The Incredible Flutist." Although Piston's name does not cause immediate excitement, this piece provides plenty of evidence that he should be heard more often. The ballet was set in Spain and Iberian tunes and rhythms characterize much of the score.

It's not often that one gets to hear classical musicians raise a ruckus, but there they were — the GSO shouting and talking, which provided a perfect hubbub to accompany a section depicting a parade. Much of the success of the work is due to the six percussionists who were busy throughout the score.

Horn player Eric Ruske joined the orchestra for a performance of Reinhold Gliere's Concerto for Horn. Although the work was written by the Russian composer in the

WANT TO GO?

What: Greensboro Symphony Orchestra with Eric Ruske, French horn. Stuart Malina, conductor.

Where: War Memorial Auditorium, Greensboro.

When: Monday, 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$27, \$20, \$15 and \$12 with special discounts for students/senior citizens. 333-7490

1950s, it has more in common with Tchaikovsky than with Stravinsky. Lush string melodies abound, and expressive playing was the order of the day.

Ruske proved to be quite an advocate for the piece. Though most of the work is lyric in nature, there are virtuoso moments as well. Ruske displayed a wide array of tone colors to match every mood put forth in the concerto and the technique to handle the rapid passages without a hitch.

Ravel's "Bolero" is composed of a two-part melody that is repeated over and over again. One of the elements that prevents the work from becoming boring is the gradual crescendo that takes place, beginning with the softest of sounds and culminating in a gigantic climax. Malina was able to hold the tempo in check so that the performance became more and more in-

tense through its own dynamic growth.

Helping to hold the rhythm in check was the superb constancy provided by principal percussionist Wiley Sykes' snare drum, upon which the distinct bolero rhythm is played.

Bolero also divided the audience into three age groups: those that knew the piece before Bo Derek starred in the movie "10," those who associate Bolero with the movie; and those who have no idea of what I'm talking about.

The evening closed with the Symphonic Dances from "West Side Story" by Leonard Bernstein. Again, a large percussion ensemble helped to make this a winning performance, and at the center was Sykes, this time on trap set. This is great American music, and it was performed with the vigor and sensitivity needed.

From the raucous moments depicting street gangs to the extremely tenuous tender measures of love between Maria and Tony, the GSO was able to traverse the emotional terrain.

Thanks to Malina and the GSO for an interesting program of music played with commitment and vitality.

Tim Lindeman is a free-lance contributor.