

Bruckner performance has the notes—not the music

By Stephen Wigler
Sun Music Critic

With their gigantic masses that shift almost as slowly and as inexorably as tectonic plates, Bruckner's symphonies are the most dangerous Fafnirs in the repertory. Play a Mahler symphony poorly, and it's bad; play one by Bruckner badly, and it's also boring.

The performance of Bruckner's Symphony No. 9 by the Baltimore Symphony last night in Meyerhoff Hall was neither bad nor boring, but it was ordinary. This was probably conductor Stanislaw Skrowaczewski's fault. The BSO does not play much Bruckner, but it gave a great performance of the Sixth Symphony a few seasons back under Gunter Herbig. Last night they played all of Bruckner's notes at Skrowaczewski's tempos. It often seemed — particularly in the first two movements — that nothing was happening. Some of the conductor's ideas sounded peculiar: he took the scherzo, for example, too quickly. The musicians were able to play

the notes. What they weren't able to do at that speed was to pound out the Brucknerian fury with sufficient emphasis to create a sense of irony and evil.

In the first movement, phrase did not lead into phrase with the needed cumulative force. The final slow movement — perhaps the most gigantic ever to "close" (Bruckner did not live to complete a fourth movement) a symphony — was much better, with the music seeming to vanish at the end.

The concert began with a miraculous performance of Richard Strauss' Oboe Concerto by guest soloist Heinz Holliger. The Swiss oboist has a sound that may not be beautiful to ears accustomed to the best American players: It is reedy and thin, and there is no mistaking it for a flute or a clarinet. But with this lighter, brighter sound, Holliger soars.

Skrowaczewski and the orchestra gave him an accompaniment that could have been tidier — the strings often seemed somewhat behind the soloist — but Holliger can convince one that the Strauss concerto — not from the composer's top drawer — is a masterpiece.

Classical music

Annapolis Chorale, (201) 263-4471, Box 4083, Annapolis, (301) 956-6881. April 6, 8 p.m.: Concert by Chamber Chorus, orchestra and tenor Gary Leard. St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Church Circle, Annapolis.

Baltimore County Concert Band. April 7, 3 p.m.: Concert at Essex Community College. Call 522-1421.

Baltimore Museum of Art, Charles Street and Art Museum Drive. April 7, 3:30 p.m.: Concert series featuring winners of Baltimore Chamber Music Awards. Meyerhoff Auditorium.

Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, 783-8000. Concerts in Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, 1212 Cathedral St., unless otherwise noted.

April 6, 8:15 p.m.: Celebrity Series. Stanislaw Skrowaczewski conducting, Heinz Holliger, oboist.

April 6, 8:15 p.m.: Pope Series. Paul Gemignani conducting, soprano Carolann Page. April 10-12, 10:30 a.m. and noon: "Music for Young" concert. Choral Komitatu conducting. Rheda Becker, narrator.

Candlelight Concert Society, 720-1027 or 598-6263. Concerts in Smith Theater, Howard Community College.

April 7, 8 p.m.: Smithsonian String Quartet. April 7, 8 p.m., 2:30 p.m. and 4 p.m.: Children's concert of Indonesian Music and Dance.

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, 5200 N.

Charles St., 433-8803. Concerts Sundays at 5:30 p.m. April 7: Pianist Rebecca Spaatz.

Charlestown Retirement Community, 711-715 Maiden Choice Lane off Wilkens Avenue, Catonsville, 538-4782. April 7, 3 p.m.: Holden and Lester piano recital.

Evergreen Carriage House, 4545 N. Charles St., 338-7941. April 12, 8 p.m.: Flutist Bonita Boyd, harpist Heidi Lehvalder.

Handel Choir of Baltimore, 366-5544. April 7, 4 p.m.: Verdi's Requiem with Handel Festival Orchestra and guest soloists. Kraushaar Auditorium, Goucher College.

Robert Haingrove, pianist. April 8, 8 p.m.: Recital in Brodbeck Music Hall, Hood College, Frederick. Call (301) 693-3131.

Johns Hopkins University, Charles and 34th streets, 338-9450. April 7, 7:30 p.m.: Shriver Hall Concert Series. Arditi String Quartet.

Montpelier Cultural Arts Center, 12826 Laurel-Bowie Road, Laurel, (301) 792-0864. Spring Recital Series. April 7, 3 p.m.: Tenor William Shields.

Morgan State University Choir. April 12, 7 p.m.: Concert to benefit Niehemah Project. Cathedral of the Incarnation, St. Paul Street and University Parkway. Call 467-3750.

Old St. Paul's Church, Charles and Saratoga streets, 955-3404. April 7, 4 p.m.: Choral Evensong by St. Paul's Choir of Men and Boys.

April 11, 12:20 p.m.: Nave concert by flutist Tatiana Johanning.

Peabody Conservatory of Music, 1 E. Mt. Vernon Place, 659-6124. April 12-13, 8:15 p.m.: Baltimore premiere of Cavalli's 1644 opera "Orlando" by Peabody Opera Theater and Peabody Symphony Orchestra. Friedberg Concert Hall.

Agil Radio, pianist, April 7, 3:30 p.m. Recital at Second Presbyterian Church, 4200 St. Paul St. Call 467-4510.

Towson State University, Oiler and Cross Campus drives, Towson, 830-2839.

April 5, 8 p.m.: 20th anniversary program by Gospel Choir.

April 6, 8:15 p.m.: Spring concert by Music Preparatory Division to benefit scholarship fund.

April 7, 7:30 p.m.: Concert by Towson Fine Arts Wind Quintet.

University of Maryland Baltimore County, 5401 Wilkens Ave., 455-2942.

April 11, 8 p.m.: Trio Americas concert.

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