

Generous spirit in orchestra

BY JACOB SISKIND
Citizen music critic

The first thing you notice at a concert conducted by Franz-Paul Decker is the quality of sound the orchestra produces. It is invariably warm, intense, filled with rare inner vitality.

The next thing, not quite so obvious, is the way in which the music is phrased. There are long, singing lines that ebb and flow, that fluctuate in response to the character of the music being presented.

That was evident in all of the selections in the program Decker is currently offering with the National Arts Centre Orchestra in the NAC Opera. Whether the music is by Saint-Saens, Sarasate or Schumann, there is a generosity of spirit in the playing that speaks volumes.

Decker is also presenting the world premiere of a work by Ottawa area composer Peter Paul Koprowski at these concerts and it is typical that he has lavished as much attention to detail in the preparation of this new work as he has in the more familiar selections he is offering.

Koprowski's *Sinfonia Concertante* was commissioned by the NAC and is being given more than the traditional first performances. Decker will take the work on his program when the NAC Orchestra tours southern Ontario in early March. The work will be heard live in concert and is being broadcast by the CBC.

The piece was composed as a challenge for the players, demanding the utmost virtuosity of the winds and a solo string quartet. The players met these challenges head on and made the most of the opportunity.

The work is in four contrasting move-

Music review

NAC Orchestra,
NAC Opera, Wednesday and Thursday, 8 p.m.

ments, each substantially different from the others. The moods range from quiet desperation to manic panic and explore a mixture of human emotions. That the piece ends without resolution is representative of our time.

Scott St. John was the soloist in two familiar showpieces, the Saint-Saens *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* and Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen*. He plays with confidence and he impressed the audience. Decker provided a setting of narrow velvet on which the soloist could cast his pearls.

But, in many ways, the Schumann *Symphony No. 3, The Rhenish*, was the musical high point of the evening. This is the least performed of the composer's four symphonies because it poses its interpreters so many problems.

Not the least of these is the fourth movement, originally described by the composer as a "solemn ceremony" and which has eluded most interpreters. Decker made this section one of the focal points of his reading, adding strength here rather than the usual confusion.

The other movements unfolded with rare eloquence.

The NAC Orchestra has rarely played with greater intensity, greater freedom and more supple phrasing.

This was music-making of an order too rarely encountered at concerts and those who are to hear the repeat of the program this evening have a real treat in store.