

## Showcase

# Oien's flute soars

By Pauline Durichen  
Record staff

One of the most overworked terms in musical description is color, a word borrowed from its legitimate home in visual art to embrace happenings that only the active ear can absorb.

Yet even with its limitations, color was easily the dominant theme of Friday's striking Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Masterpiece series concert at Centre in the Square (repeated tonight at 8 p.m.). In this case, the traditional palette of 19th-century classics found on many orchestra core programs was vividly displaced by works of both earlier and later vintage under the direction of guest conductor Uri Mayer.

Most recent was the massive Flute Concerto by Polish-born Canadian composer, Peter Paul Koprowski (b. 1947), featuring the gifted and versatile Norwegian soloist, Per Oien.

It may seem illogical to set this lyrical, elegant wind against an aggressive force of competing textures, but Koprowski (who attended Friday's performance) did just that, turning a potential nightmare of balance and coherence into a triumph of imaginative scoring.

The flute literally took the high road through a vast landscape of rhythmic and tonal variety, its musical gestures often suggesting a lithe gazelle, pursued relentlessly by powerful and distinctly-voiced predators who never succeed in trapping it. It was an illusion that took secure flight in Oien's elastic shifts between supple linear phrases and contrasting bursts of athletic staccato motifs.

There was no mistaking the influence of Stravinsky in Koprowski's extreme vertical expanse of sound, where startling individual and sectional detail flashed among intense, complex percussion and rumbling layers of bass.

But perhaps the strongest impression left from this unlikely instrumental contest was its eminent suitability as a major solo medium. Over a 30-minute length and unbroken three-sectioned structure, the flute was continually challenged and expressively extended, yet never technically abused or made to adopt an alien personality. Fortunately, Koprowski didn't forget that substantial and imposing statements thrive on the companionship of wit.



Per Oien

His concerto does, however, require an adventurous approach to stamina, concentration and delivery, as well as unconventional orchestra-soloist etiquette — elements that demand not only fine resonance and fingerwork, but also a passionate conviction and joy in the music itself. Oien gave all of that in full measure and was backed by an equally involved ensemble.

Oien joined KWS principal flutist Thomas Kay for the evening's earliest selection, the Concerto for Two Flutes and Orchestra, written in 1793 by the late classical Italian composer, Domenico Cimarosa.

The three contrasting movements, supported by a more intimate chamber-sized group of strings and winds, showcased a thoroughly attractive partnership whose distinct personalities in tone and articulation complemented one another ideally. Most impressive were the elaborate unaccompanied duo cadenzas that captured a rare and stylish spontaneity, particularly in the unusual exposure of two equal instrumental voices.

Orchestra selections featured the mellow and compact Overture to an Unwritten Comedy by Canadian composer Healey Willan (1880-1968), and the fascinating Symphony No. 1 (Op. 10) by Soviet master Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), an astounding exploration of symphonic energy created when the composer was only 18 years of age.

Fuelled mainly by the vigorous optimism of youth, the four-movement work overflowed with soloistic detail that featured nearly every principal KWS player. Besides its powerful rhythms and dynamics, one could also relish the very real presence of melody without the conventional need of a tune.