

# San Francisco Chronicle

Tuesday, October 28, 2008

The Hungarian composer Miklós Rózsa is best known for his film scores, a starry roster that includes music for "Double Indemnity," "Spellbound," "Ben-Hur" and even the Steve Martin spoof "Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid." But he was trained as a concert composer, and his magnificent Violin Concerto from 1953 was the high point of Sunday night's Berkeley concert by the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra.

With Robert McDuffie as the brilliant soloist and Music Director Leon Botstein leading a keenly impassioned performance, Rózsa's three-movement score - written as a vehicle for Jascha Heifetz and later adapted for Billy Wilder's 1970 film "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes" - soared, dipped, sang and cavorted with all the fervor of a true entertainer. It was mad, potent stuff.

The musical thinking in this score is a canny and powerful blend of the abstract and the cinematic. The first movement is built out of two immediately recognizable themes: one an expansive, plangent melody that generates energy out of its kinetic shifts between major and minor, and the other a torrential burst of rapid violin figuration.

Rózsa sets these two in alternation for a while, and through the first half of the movement it seems as though his only stratagem is the old one, of working the contrasts between them. But midway through the movement, he begins to find new life in his materials, and he goes back to them repeatedly, working over the thematic elements in new and different guises without ever wearing them out.

The slow movement is built on similar principles - the violin gets a long-breathed melodic solo, but Rózsa then dissects it for the audience with a showman's delight. Only the finale, a ferocious display vehicle for the soloist, is exactly what it seems.

McDuffie, the American virtuoso who has been away from the Bay Area for far too long, gave the piece every ounce of vitality and panache it needed. The outer movements were athletic and precise, especially in the extended cadenza of the first movement, and the slow movement gained an extra measure of urgency in McDuffie's eloquent reading.

The rest of the concert, presented by Cal Performances in Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall, was more hit-or-miss. Botstein, who also runs the American Symphony Orchestra in New York and the Bard Music Festival, has a fondness for unearthing forgotten scores of the 20th century, and he led off the evening with "Big Ben," Ernst Toch's 1934 set of variations on the familiar London clock chimes.

Toch, who fled the Nazis in 1935, and wound up, like so many European exiles, in Southern California, has come in for some re-examination in recent years (Michael Tilson Thomas has brushed off some of his music with the San Francisco Symphony). Yet the inspiration and depth in his music rarely matches its degree of simple proficiency.

"Big Ben" is no exception. It's hard not to admire the ingenuity with which Toch weaves the theme through a variety of different settings, but it's even harder to remember much about the piece once it's over.

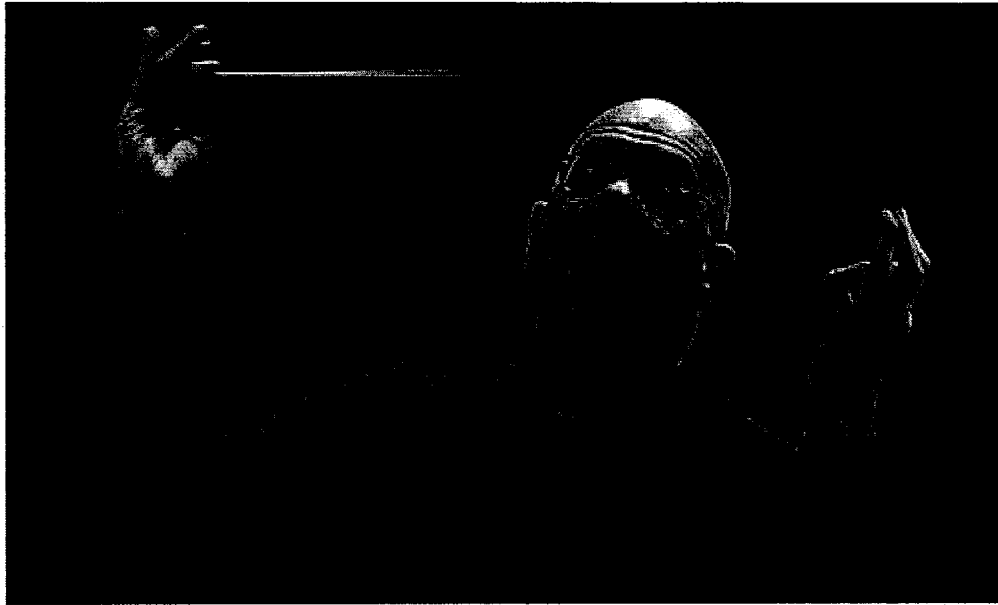
The second half of the concert was given over to an uneven account of Copland's Third Symphony, ripe and direct in the inner movements but often thin and edgy in the more rhetorically robust sections. Leroy Anderson's "Blue Tango" and an orchestral arrangement of Naomi Shemer's song "Jerusalem of Gold" were the encores.

*Joshua Kosman*

# Los Angeles Times

October 29, 2008

## Review: The Jerusalem Symphony at UCLA's Royce Hall



Lawrence K. Ho, Los Angeles Times

**WITH ENERGY:** Leon Botstein pushed the Jerusalem Symphony players out of their glum comfort zone.

Leon Botstein gets the usually somber Jerusalem Symphony to show a brighter side.

By MARK SWED, Music Critic

October 30, 2008

Leon Botstein is a can-do conductor eager to get a bright sound out of almost any orchestra, even the moody Jerusalem Symphony. So Tuesday night, Botstein -- who juggles a music directorship in the Israeli capital with his other day jobs as president of Bard College and music director of the American Symphony Orchestra -- attempted to turn on the lights when he brought his intensely dark-hued Jerusalem band to Royce Hall for a UCLA Live concert. Considerable energy was required.

This is an orchestra born of optimism. Founded 70 years ago as a radio ensemble in what was then Palestine, it helped provide a sense of cultural identity to a Jewish state seeking independence from British rule. But it is also an orchestra that knows depression. Not only are many of its players refugees, but the ensemble, which has recently come out of a financial crisis, is underdog to the glitzier, internationally known Israel Philharmonic.

A historian by training, Botstein began Tuesday with history -- Erich Walter Sternberg's "The