

Corwin leads Civic through joyful pastoral

By DERYK BARKER
Times Colonist staff

The perfection of the metronome in 1815 by Johann Nepomuk Maelzel was an important moment in the history of music. The first major composer to utilise metronome markings was Beethoven, who even added them to earlier scores.

Beethoven's markings have always, however, been controversial; he tended to change his mind about them and publishers misread his instructions. It has even been suggested that he was confused over exactly which part of the weight indicated the tempo; or that the markings of a man who could not hear the music except inside his head are unreliable at best.

Since the late 20th century quest for the chimera of "authenticity" began, a number of name conductors have attempted to use Beethoven's published markings. Few, if any, have managed to make them sound convincing.

Saturday night's performance of Beethoven's Sixth, the 'Pastoral', was therefore remarkable for a number of reasons: firstly conductor George Corwin took Beethoven's markings literally, secondly he did this with a part-time orchestra of former professionals and amateurs, and, finally, he achieved the near-impossible and made it all work. This is

REVIEW

Who: Civic Orchestra of Victoria
With: Dexine Wallbank, violin;
George Corwin, conductor

particularly tricky in the opening movement, which should sound — as it did on Saturday — joyful but without being rushed.

The flowing second movement included a myriad of vivid details — particularly from the wind at the close, the 'Peasants' merrymaking' was suitably rustic, the storm beautifully controlled and shaped and, when the sun finally emerged in the finale, all was glowing thankfulness.

Corwin explained to the audience that he had never conducted the 'Pastoral' previously, because he had never been able to "find" the work. On Saturday night he did so unerringly.

The last of Mozart's five violin concertos is generally acknowledged to be the finest; certainly those who plan musical programs locally would seem to agree: by my reckoning Saturday's performance of the so-called 'Turkish' concerto was the third I've heard in five months — the second in October alone.

It is a tribute to Dexine Wallbank and her accompanists, then, that not one moment of Saturday's per-

formance seemed superfluous. The reduced orchestra provided an excellently-balanced accompaniment, while Wallbank was a most sympathetic soloist.

I must particularly comment on the finale, which is in the form of a minuet enclosing the wilder, 'Turkish' music. For once, the minuet was not taken at a stately pace, but was full of life and sounded, indeed, like a dance for people not poseurs.

The evening opened with a dramatic account of Beethoven's Coriolan overture, whose long, intense crescendos were thrillingly contoured.

Another memorable evening from the Civic.

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