

Philharmonic aces test

Performance of Beethoven's 9th Symphony soars

By CHARLES WEBB
For The Republic

A performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony taxes the limits of all orchestras, choruses and soloists everywhere. But fearless conductor David Bowden of the Columbus Indiana Philharmonic took on such a task last Saturday night in addition to two other substantive works on the program and produced an electrifying evening that brought the large and enthusiastic audience to its feet with shouts of bravo.

REVIEW

The concert began with a brief section of Berlioz's five-act opera, "Les Troyens." This section, titled "Royal Hunt and Storm," depicts in vivid detail all sorts of nymphs, silvans and fauns.

From the placid opening of strings and flutes, one could not imagine the wild, resonant brass and percussion sounds that would shortly appear from instrumentalists placed all around the Erne Auditorium. The polyphonic effect was stunning.

Suddenly the Philharmonic chorus in all its splendor rose from the orchestra pit providing a dramatic musical and visual moment.

Then, as quickly as they had appeared, the pit was lowered and the chorus became invisible. Bowden coordinated the disparate forces with precision, and the interlude came to a tuneful denouement — a splendid and dramatic opening for what was to follow.

Next we heard "Sea Pictures" by Edward Elgar, who became England's most noted composer during the first part of the 20th century. Elgar used the work of five poets for the text of this haunting, melodious music, including poems by his wife, Caroline, and



SUBMITTED

Mezzo-soprano Jane Dutton sang with the Columbus Indiana Philharmonic in its performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Jane Dutton, world-acclaimed mezzo-soprano, sang the solo parts of this engaging work. Dutton, a native of Columbus, has sung in most of the leading opera houses of the world as well as with major symphony orchestras everywhere.

Her mellifluous, golden voice projected the imaginative texts superbly, and Bowden — with attention to every nuance — provided just the right amount of support without ever overpowering the voice. Carefully shaped rubatos throughout the wide vocal range gave strength and beauty to Elgar's emotional music.

Ludwig van Beethoven was the single most important link between the classicism of Mozart and Haydn and romanticism of Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, Mendelssohn and a host of other magnificent musical minds. It is difficult to imagine that the same person could produce his early piano sonatas and string quartets, and later in life his last string quartets, sonatas, Missa Solemnis and his Ninth Symphony.

Bowden chose brisk tempos

throughout and in a brief conversation following the concert told me about his fascinating research into Beethoven's original tempos and his use of a metronome.

Bowden's choices gave the work an urgency and power, but at times I would have preferred slightly slower tempi with more attention to dynamic contrasts, especially in the first movement. Throughout that section one hears allusions to thematic elements in the final choral movement.

The second movement, a brisk scherzo, followed immediately and the players are to be congratulated for keeping steady the difficult amphimacer rhythmic pattern, never letting it degenerate into an eighth followed by two sixteenths, a common flaw in many performances.

Finally we come to the climax of this gargantuan work. The choral section is announced by brass and after a brief interlude the famous "Ode to Joy" theme is stated by cellos and string basses in octaves.

The excellent vocal quartet — Alison Bates, soprano; Dutton, alto; Thomas Studebaker, tenor; and Cody Medina, bass-baritone — sang with authority and penetrating sound. Medina sang the opening bass salvo with a powerful and resonant voice, and Studebaker acquitted himself extremely well in the tenor solo that occurs above Beethoven's strange interjection of a Turkish March.

Entrance of the chorus in the stirring "Ode to Joy" taxes all singers to the limits of their vocal capacity. The Philharmonic chorus sang with precision and full-throated sound and maintained excellent pitch and balance throughout this strenuous section.

Bowden brought this mighty work to a rousing conclusion with a thrilling accelerando to the very last note.