

Symphony proves deeply satisfying

By JAY CARR

News Drama and Music Critic

Quite possibly, the Detroit Symphony has performed some recent concerts that were as profoundly satisfying as last night's. But offhand I can't think of any.

With the veteran Max Rudolf on the Ford Auditorium podium and a young Japanese pianist, Etsuko Tazaki, as soloist, every measure of a program that encompassed Mozart, Prokofiev, Webern and Schumann throbbed with life.

Music seems so simple when it's played right.

There are no shortcuts to the ripeness and confidence with which Rudolf advanced the music. They are the product of having assimilated the music and its styles during the course of his 73 years. And all the performances had that little extra sense of lift so often heard when a man of the theater presides.

One recalls with pleasure many of the performances that Rudolf led at the Metropolitan Opera during the '50's, and his performance of Mozart's seldom-encountered "Paris" Symphony, No. 31 in D, K. 297, had the sort of elegant verve that can only come of conducting many performances of "Don Giovanni" and "Nozze di Figaro."

The other series premiere was of Anton Webern's Op. 1, the Passacaglia for Orchestra. This isn't Webern the avant-gardist. Here he was still working in traditional postromantic idioms and, although the formal rigor and genius for compression are very much present, Webern is much closer to Mahler than

Schoenberg. Again, the idiom posed no problems for Rudolf.

But Rudolf was at his best in the Schumann Symphony No. 4. Many conductors miss the point with Schumann. Not since the days of Paul Paray have we heard Schumann approached with such sensitivity to meaning and color. Like Paray, Rudolf doesn't make the mistake of trying to refine and polish the often ungainly writing.

He knows how Schumann's heady eruptions of energy can lift the entire score into orbit, and he goes with them, making the most of these flights of romantic exuberance, playing them against the pages of dark melancholy. The result is the same sort of vivid, masculine dash that Paray used to bring to this repertoire.

Miss Tazaki really rates a bouquet, too. It so happens that two of the strongest solo performances of the Detroit Symphony season have been in Prokofiev Piano Concertos: Horacio Gutierrez's of No. 2 and Miss Tazaki's, last night, of No. 3.

Her performance was simply electrifying. Indeed, it uncannily recalled Prokofiev's own recording of this concerto.

Miss Tazaki conjured up much of the steely dynamism of Prokofiev himself, who played at the edge of the keys and knew how to bring out the audacious superimpositions in his writing. The bold shifts in color abet the drama when the music grows lyrical, as it does in the variations of the second movement. Miss Tazaki repeatedly made one recall Poulenc's famous likening of Prokofiev's playing to the unwinding of a precision motor spring.

It was a night of glorious music-making all around.