

# Pianofest Veteran Satisfies His Following

By Fred Volkmer

The Music Festival of the Hamptons has presented a considerable variety of concerts in an assortment of venues since its beginning this year on June 24. It offers pianists (a lot of pianists), chamber music of all sorts, and orchestral music. The three concerts I attended on July 11, 12, and 14, are fairly representative.

On July 11, in the tasting room of the Wölffer Estate Vineyards, the pianist was the very fine pianist Michael Schneider. Mr. Schneider is a seven-year veteran of Pianofest and his devoted following filled the hall.

He opened with a Haydn Sonata, Hob. XVI:39, unlisted on the program, and brought to it a remarkable refinement, wit, effervescence, and crystalline grace, following it with the four Op. 17 Mazurkas of Chopin, imbued with an exile's heartrending longing.

Mr. Schneider has an affinity for these composers, as he has for Liszt. He has won a number of Liszt competitions, and he showed the audience how with two of the Transcendental Etudes, the "Mazeppa" and "Harmonies du soir."

The "Mazeppa," particularly, called for a knuckle-busting technique, of which he had plenty to spare. Mr. Schneider is no "kitten on the keys," and his playing was robust and energetic, entirely suited to this over-the-top music.

Of another order entirely was the very touching Liszt transcription of Robert Schumann's song, "Widmung" ("Dedication"), one composer's act of homage to another and, in its original manifestation, Schumann's wedding present to Clara.

## MUSIC REVIEW

The closing work of the program was the Liszt "Après une Lecture de Dante," an auditory and condensed version of Dante's "Divine Comedy," following Dante in his ascent from the Inferno to Paradiso. This is music that transcends Liszt the showman and captures the torment and the quest for spiritual security of the man who had been a Franciscan novice at 19.

Mr. Schneider's encore for this very satisfying program was a morsel by Paderewski.

The next evening in the same location, the superb clarinetist Alex Fiterstein, a festival regular, returned with his wife, violinist Meira Silverstein, and the pianist Benjamin Hochman.

They opened with an unscheduled Trio by the Czech composer Jan Van Hal, a contemporary of Haydn and Mozart. The trio was sprightly and graceful, merry actually. It plumbed no depths, but it had a gracious sunniness that lifted the spirits on a rainy evening.

Mr. Hochman followed this with Bach's English Suite No. 3. Mr. Hochman harked back to an earlier style of Bach performance. It was as if neither Glenn Gould nor the early music movement had ever happened. There was no denying Mr. Hochman's skill or his uniquely romantic musicianship, but my ears cried out for less pedal and less of an organ tone in these normally finely spun dances.

Mr. Hochman's romanticism was aptly deployed as he joined Mr. Fiterstein in the final two works of the evening, Schumann's

"Fantasiestücke" (Fantasy Pieces) for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 73, and Brahms's Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in F minor, Op. 120, No. 1.

On Friday, July 14, under the new festival tent on the Wölffer grounds, the evening belonged to the festival's new orchestra, the Camerata New York, under the direction of Richard Owen Jr. It is by far the best orchestra I have heard here, excepting Itzhak Perlman's orchestra of Perlman music camp prodigies.

The program for the evening included Schubert's "Rosamunde" Overture and Strauss's "Die Fledermaus" Overture, to both of which Mr. Owen brought a light and melodic touch, as well as an air of celebration. One could almost hear the champagne corks popping.

Performances were polished and energetic. Mr. Owen's conducting was incisive, expressive, and easy to follow.

The centerpiece of the program was the Mozart Piano Concerto No. 21 in C Major, K. 467. The pianist was Richard Raymond, a Canadian musician who was a winner of the chamber music prize at the Van Cliburn Competition. Mr. Raymond, I thought, gave one of the most uninvolved and uninvolving performances of that concerto I've ever heard.

The final work of the evening was Beethoven's Symphony No. 7. The orchestra dug into it with a will, giving a gripping and powerful performance.

I was completely convinced by Mr. Owen's interpretation of the symphony and in utter admiration of the performance.

