

Engaging Mozart, sloppy Bizet

DEON IRISH

SYMPHONY CONCERT,
City Hall. CTSO conducted by Jorge Mester.

Soloist Piet Koornhof;

Berlioz: Overture *Beatrice and Benedict*; Mozart: Violin Concerto No 5 in A major (*Turkish*); Barber: *Adagio for Strings*; Bizet: *Symphony in C*.

CONCERT REVIEW

THIS was a concert in which the first half beat the second by a few lengths. True, the Barber *Adagio* was not a poor performance but the Mozart was better. And the sloppiness of the Bizet symphony far outweighed the minor imperfections of the Berlioz overture.

In fact, the only real complaint concerning the overture was a rather overpowering brass presence at times, skewing balances and ignoring the composer's own injunction that the work "is a caprice written with the point of a needle [requiring] an extremely delicate performance".

The Potchefstroom-based violinist Piet Koornhof has performed with the CTSO on number of occasions, not all of them entirely felicitous. This time, however, he demonstrated his real musical and technical abilities in an account of

the Mozart A Major Concerto which was delicately engaging from first to last.

The solo lines in the Mozart violin concerti are so exposed that they afford the soloist little, if any, place to hide. They accordingly expose, in brutal fashion, any shortcomings in technique, particularly of intonation. This has been an area in which Koornhof has been inconsistent in past performances.

How gratifying it was, accordingly, to find his left hand intonationally secure, effortlessly creating intervals and lines of crystalline purity, from the measured phrase of the introductory statement to the final infectious strains of the winsome minuet. Only fleetingly, in the arpeggiatic writing of the first movement *cadenza*, was there any departure from this standard.

The opening orchestral *ritornello* was

rather breathless, given the immediately succeeding violin statement; there was detectable throughout the movement a degree of rhythmic tension between the soloist and the orchestral accompaniment, leaving one with the impression that Mester was consistently trying to force the tempo.

Koornhof created a beautifully serene *arioso* line in the *adagio*, full of underlying yearning, which was regrettably not consistently matched by the at times harsh wind chorus, lacking luminosity of tone in the directness of attack.

The final minuet, with its *alla turca* episode, began at a relatively brisk tempo, perhaps missing a little of the tongue-in-cheek gravity — even wistfulness — which is attained at a more measured tempo.

Still, the "turkish" writing (which gives the concerto its sobriquet) was energetic enough; perhaps a little too energetic in the uncalled for *accelerandi* in the downward scale passages.

The Barber *Adagio* suffered from a lack of breathing, the opening phrases being rather run together. There are those who like the work this way; maestro Mester is clearly one of them. One of the delightful (or frustrating) things about music is the extent to which it allows for differences of approach and taste.

On this approach to the phrases in question, we will doubtless agree to differ.

Regarding the sloppiness of execution in the notoriously vicious little Bizet Symphony, however, questions of approach are irrelevant. Violin passages out of kilter are just that, so is rhythmic instability.

The performance was characterised by both.