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### Audience Ravished By Clarinet

SYMPHONY CONCERT (Odeion, Bloemfontein - South Africa) by the Free State Symphony Orchestra conducted by Chris Dowdeswell. Soloist: Bryan Crumpler (Clarinet)

COMING from America - where everything is bigger and better - Bryan Crumpler's glowing reputation brought somewhat of an element of doubt: "How masterful can a 28-year old clarinet player be?".

Through his playing alone, Crumpler answered: Good enough to arouse the audience to their feet in a standing ovation, which is not always the acknowledgement for true artistry in Bloemfontein - but connoisseurs concurred in this instance about Crumpler's excellent interpretation of the Mozart Clarinet Concerto in A-major.

His most powerful ammunition is his sound. Crumpler transformed the inherent velvety sound of the clarinet into a smooth satin finish, tainted by not a single shrill blemish. Mozart, who wrote the concerto shortly before his death - leaving it to be the only work in this genre for clarinet, hinted towards music of the Romantic era in the first two movements with delicate, lyrical writing.

Crumpler was visibly one with the music. Contrary to practices of most wind players, he performed the work entirely from memory, which consequently resulted in a freer, more intense interpretation of that Mozartean lyricism. Delicate playing and superbly controlled dynamic contrasts in a call and response-like fashion was supported by a well-anchored sense of rhythm.

In the well-known second movement, one sat in awe of the holy-like quality of the music. In the final virtuosic movement, Crumpler avoided the pitfall of sacrificing feeling and tenderness for rapid, technical ostentatiousness.

This seemed to avert whether the recent inclusion of three very competent, key players made a big difference on the Free State Symphony's orchestral playing.

The technical playing of the orchestra is not significantly any better yet under the leadership of newcomers Denise Sutton (Concertmistress), Sharon de Kock (principal 2nd violin), and Jeanne-Louise Moolman (principal viola), but there does appear to be a stronger commitment to musical integrity.

The orchestra was at risk, although Crumpler's standard in the concerto certainly inspired the orchestra to a finer level of artistry when compared to the orchestra's performance of the Mozart Symphony No. 39 in E-flat Major, K543.

Unequal playing, presumably due to the fast tempo, introduced the last movement. On the other hand, however, the transparent peacefulness characterising the second movement was very well conveyed.

Eight brass players conducted by Paul Loeb van Zuilenburg opened the concert with Gabrieli's *Symphonia Sacrale* - in *Excelsiis*.

Placing four brass on the stage and four in the back of the concert hall worked surprisingly well. It was good for the younger players to be so exposed out in the open.

When I say it was marvellous to hear a worthwhile symphony concert again, I speak on behalf of serious music lovers. Conductor Chris Dowdeswell's contribution to that enjoyment also deserves to be applauded.

- Elretha Britz

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