

Symphony fumbles, recovers in celebrity series opener

By **STEPHEN PEDERSEN**

After an unusually uncomfortable first half in the Cohn last night, Symphony Nova Scotia laid into Dvorak's New World Symphony with a will to work a wonder.

And that, under the guidance of Conductor Emeritus Georg Tintner in this first Celebrity series concert of the season, is exactly what they did.

They took on this marvellous score, so overplayed every note is predictable, every climax a foregone conclusion, and made it sound as fresh as though they were born again.

I, for one, saw the light.

Dvorak, in this work, displays the most elegant kind of freedom married to an inexhaustible motherlode of invention. The themes are all simple and pretty, and in his hands, endlessly and blessedly combined and recombined.

The result, if the work is played with the splendid verve and spirit and technical brilliance of the symphony players last night, is one surprise of delight after another waiting around every musical corner.

It is difficult to know which to praise more — the composer, the conductor or the players. But there isn't a section of the orchestra that

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Dvorak fails to shine the light on in this score. And there wasn't a section that didn't give it back with added warmth and color.

Unfortunately, the first work of the evening, Wagner's Faust Overture, was a complete doppelganger, an opposite in every way. The orchestra played as though they were trying to speak a foreign tongue. It wasn't together, it was out of tune, and it lacked confidence.

The Brahms Double Concerto for Violin and Cello bucked them up considerably, though it is an extremely tough course to play.

Brahms balances a symphonic style where the parts are sacrificed to the effect of the whole, against a concerto style where the soloist(s) is king.

These are powerful polarities, powerfully condensed. And with players like violinist Philippe Djokic and cellist Michelle Djokic, the energy and momentum of the solo parts were assertive and self-confident.

A set of three trifles by Toronto composer Lothar Klein acted as palate cleanser before the Dvorak.

Gathered under the title, *Homage a Lautrec*, this Valse, Chanson and Galop walked a very thin plank between cleverness and self-parody.

The tunes were light, the orchestration almost too smart-alecky, full of kaleidoscopic overlays and recombinations of instrumental timbre and color.

Most of these were quite winning and not quite annoying — like the piccolo playing high above the violins in harmony on the mushy part of the fingerboard — charming enough — but almost immediately spoiled by the introduction of a Lawrence Welkish doubling by the orchestral bells — no reflection on the excellence playing thereof by Jimmie Faraday.

This program will be repeated 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Cohn as part of Symphony's new Romantics Series.