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Symphonie Fantastique played properly by VSO

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Southam News

VANCOUVER — The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra (VSO) has a habit of doing things in a big way.

It claims the biggest number of subscribers (40,000) of any orchestra in the world.

Its annual total attendance figures have now topped the 300,000 mark.

It performs in the West Coast's famed Orpheum which also happens to be the biggest and most opulent concert hall in the country.

Finally, in the interests of giving the restored Orpheum a supersonic work-out, it recently delivered a musical blockbuster by cramming 180 musicians on stage for a trio of concerts showcasing Hector Berlioz's mammoth *Symphonie Fantastique*.

The VSO's 85 musicians were joined on this occasion by the 95-member Osaka Philharmonic Orchestra, a renowned Japanese institution which chose Vancouver for its North American debut before embarking on a three-week tour of the United States.

The whole enterprise may be seen as a notable venture in Pacific cultural friendship, a venture further cemented by the fact that the VSO's resident conductor, Kazuooshi Akiyama, is also

principal guest conductor of the Osaka Orchestra.

A few seasons back, when the VSO was still performing in the less exciting surroundings of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, it participated in a joint concert with the Tokyo Symphony, yet another orchestra with which Maestro Akiyama is associated.

That event was certainly outstanding. Nevertheless, this week's cycle of concerts with the Osaka Philharmonic seems of even greater significance.

In the first place, the Orpheum has already proved to be such an exciting hall acoustically with a mere 85 musicians on stage that any self-respecting sound freak naturally wants to know whether the roof will remain in place with more than twice that number of players on hand.

But even more important is the fact that these concerts have given listeners a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hear Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* performed with the big sound which its obsessed composer so frantically desired for it.

One could have easily dispensed with the orchestras' joint performance of the overture to Wagner's *Tann-*

hauser. The sound was certainly overwhelming but the quality was heavy, like glue. One could have even lived without such obvious and predictable contemporary fare as Lothar Klein's *Orchestral Suite*, which was played by the Vancouverites alone, and Japanese composer Hiroshi Ohguri's *Osaka Fantasy*, a piece of harmless schmaltz whose main virtue was that it showcased the brilliant talents of the Osaka Orchestra's various instrument sections.