

Mintz' Mendelssohn masterful

When someone gets around to sharpening his quill on the history of the violin in this century, don't be surprised to find Isaac Stern identified not only as one of the instrument's great players but equally as one of its great talent scouts.

Yet another of his discoveries (the list also includes Pinchas Zukerman and Itzhak Perlman) turned up in front of the Toronto Symphony at Massey Hall last night, in the person of Schlomo Mintz, a bushy-haired virtuoso from that desert oasis for fiddlers, Israel.

Though Mintz wasn't actually born in Israel, he left his native Russia as a child and owes his early training to the Israeli pedagogue Ilona Feher and his big break to the Israeli Philharmonic, whose conductor, Zubin Mehta, chose him some seasons ago to replace an ailing colleague in a performance of the Paganini D Major Concerto.

Interestingly enough, orchestra, conductor and violinist will all be appearing together in Massey Hall, May 29, under the auspices of the Canada Israel Cultural Federation. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Last night the conductor was Andrew Davis, the concerto was Mendelssohn's E minor, and the Shlomo Mintz who appeared as soloist did so, his Israeli and Juilliard student years behind him, at the ripe old age of 25.

How difficult it is to forgive the young their maturity! There wasn't anything about Mintz' Mendelssohn that suggested callowness, nervousness or the after effects of acne. He played the concerto with all the poise and serenity in the world and the music just flowed out of it.

Not that it gushed. From the violin's very first statement it was obvious that Mintz was not going to stretch note values to achieve an effusively singing line. If anything, he exercised emotional restraint, emphasizing the classicist as much as the romantic in Mendelssohn. Fair enough. The concerto is susceptible to encouragement in either direction and if it has sung more lyrically on other occasions it sang no less eloquently last night.

Besides, Andrew Davis was on hand to set off Mintz' patrician playing with a full-blown romantic accompaniment that completed the music's personality profile.

And speaking of personality, the program was full of it, from the brashly good-humored pages of Lothar Klein's *Musique a Go-Go* to the spirited finale of Dvorak's D Major Symphony.



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Music

The most provocative feature of *Musique a Go-Go* is its misleading title, since go-go dance music has nothing to do with the score. To the extent that popular music influences this 7½-minute orchestral showpiece it is the music of jazz. And not experimental jazz, either, but a swinging species not far removed from the kind Gershwin incorporated into his orchestral scores.

Mind you, Klein, a professor in the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, is a far more sophisticated orchestral craftsman than Gershwin. If he applies brushes to drums and cymbals, he also knows how to take ideas and develop them, and his brass writing in particular exhibits a resourcefulness beyond the capabilities of the sainted George.

Apparently *Musique a Go-Go* landed Professor Klein in hot water with his more austere inclined colleagues when it was introduced by Louis Lane and the Cleveland Orchestra back in 1967. It is easy to understand why. In addition to possessing a flippant title, the music dares to sound both boisterously tonal and downright accessible.

Not that it reached everyone last night. No sooner had the very opening chord sounded than an elderly lady in front of me turned to her companion and said, "I knew it was going to be terrible!"

The same lady nodded contentedly through Dvorak's D Major Symphony, despite Andrew Davis' apparent attempt to turn it into the *Eroica*. A less soothing performance of this evergreen score would have been difficult to imagine.

The dramatic climaxes were all thundered out, the fugato passages of the final movement raced off the speedometer (talk about fancy fiddling!) and scarcely an opportunity was missed to give the symphony a heroic dimension.

Beethoven probably would have been impressed. But Dvorak?

The program is scheduled to be repeated tonight and Thursday at 8 p.m.