Solti’s bravura approach uneven

Chicago Symphony, Sir Georg Solti con-
ducting. Murray Perahia, piano soloist at
Orchestra Hall Thursday. "Der Freischuetz":

By Robert C. Marsh

Returning to the Chicago Symphony after an absence of slightly more than a month, Sir Georg Solti began his programs for 1975 with an evening of German romantic music. His Thursday night audience found him tanned and unspur-
ing of his energies, and the or-
chestra responded to his direc-
tion with the bravura playing that is a hallmark of the Solti manner.

The bravura approach, how-
ever, was not equally well suit-
ed to all three works. The
overture to Weber’s "Der Freischuetz," for example, is filled with the dark, brooding, misterioso quality of the Ger-
man forest, a not in-
appropriate mood for an opera that involves an accused huntsman and a demon who deals in magic bullets. Here, I thought, Solti had found more of the drama of the score than the atmosphere, and some of the details of execution, in-
cluding a couple of rather con-
spicuous attacks, were still
rough.

Bravura is wanted in the
Second Symphony of Schu-
mann, but it must be mixed with a flowing lyricism to give the work its proper balance. Solti was quite aware of this. Through most of the perform-
ance the mixture was right, and the contrapuntal episode in the middle of the slow movement was given a slower and more reverent statement than it customarily receives. (Some conductors plainly re-
gard it as an unwelcome inter-
ruption.)

There is an old — and valid — maxim that pianists make the best Schumann conductors since the way to find the right sound and proper pace of much of this music is best dis-
covered by trying it out on the keyboard. Closely related to this is the tendency to simplify Schumann’s orchestration. The great Felix Weingartner was a defender of Schumann’s fantas-
ifier, and his lead was fol-
lowed by younger men, notably George Szell, whose edition of these symphonies involves a lot of blue-pencil deletions. Sol-
iti prefers to stay close to the
original and make the neces-
sary changes in the balance of the orchestra itself, especially in the fine adjustment of the wind parts, and it produces a more robust effect.

This was, therefore, a pas-
sionate, red-blooded Schumann Second, and although I would have been slightly more content if some of the tempos had been a little slower, it was a notable performance.

Where bravura was really wanted was the Second Piano Concerto of Mendelssohn, and here there was bravura in the most generous measure, first from Murray Perahia, who seems perfectly suited to this repertory, and second from Solti and the orchestra.

Perahia, who was making his first appearance with the orchestra, has all the flair for color and phrasing, all the skill in nuance and expression needed to make a Mendelssohn con-
certo sound worthy of Mozart. It was a gracious, lyric per-
formance for all its energy, and a very exciting debut.

Friends of William Stein-
berg, a frequent visitor to Chi-
cago for many years, will be
saddened to note that his 24
years as music director of the
Pittsburgh Symphony will end in August 1976 when he takes an emeritus post with the or-
chestra. Steinberg, 73, has had difficulties with his health in recent years. He will continue to be active in Pittsburgh (and elsewhere) as a guest con-
ductor, but he expressed satis-
faction at relinquishing "the heavy administrative duties" of his post and concentrating "purely on conducting." His initial appointment as emer-
itus music director is for 1976–79.