Trumpet triumph: Herseth and Solti dazzle with CSO

CLASSICAL MUSIC
By Robert C. Marsh

There must be moments for a composer when he realizes that all that life may have demanded of him has been rewarded with the public’s recognition of the value of his work. I suspect Karel Husa felt that way Thursday night when he came to the Orchestra Hall stage for the sustained applause of the Chicago Symphony audience that had just heard the world premiere of his Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra in a performance by Adolph Herseth and Georg Solti.

Herseth, who has been with the orchestra 40 years, received an ovation when he came on stage. To be given such acclaim before you even play a note suggests the love and honor Chicago gives this man for his supreme mastery of his instrument.

Husa writes for a large orchestra, and he uses a lot of percussion that produces striking effects without in any way competing with the trumpet in its strongest registers. His concerto is fresh, completely ingenious, and precisely the sort of piece to present Herseth, Solti and the CSO at the top of their form. It was written to be accessible and enjoyable, and there is no question that it meets these requirements fully without being anything less than a serious exploration of the instrument.

Herseth played as only he can play. Solti and his colleagues give him their best in support.

The concerto will go to Australia later this month with the other two scores on the program, Bartok’s suite from “The Miraculous Mandarin” and the Brahms Fourth Symphony. The Mandarin is Bartok’s reply to Stravinsky’s “The Rite of Spring,” music of incredible intensity that builds and builds in excitement. I wish we could hear the entire score from Solti, but the work is not suitable for export in that form, and the suite proves, if you had any doubt, that this is probably the best Bartok orchestra with the best Bartok conductor in the world.

If you wanted to liken Solti’s performance of the Brahms Fourth to the work of a great master of the past, the obvious choice would be Arturo Toscanini. The drama of the work as expressed in an impassioned lyric line comes first, and its architecture comes second. Romance is a weak third. I cannot argue with the validity of that interpretive approach, especially when I heard what Solti achieves in the final passacaglia, a movement played badly more often than it is played well. More warmth would mean fewer thrills. You have to make your choice.

This was fabulous playing. Australia will be dazzled, I am sure.

Chicago Symphony, Georg Solti conductor, with Adolph Herseth, trumpet, at Orchestra Hall Thursday
Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra, Husa; “Miraculous Mandarin” suite, Bartok; Symphony No. 4, Brahms.