Solti lightens up on Beethoven's 2nd

CLASSICAL MUSIC

By Robert C. Marsh

February is hardly begun and Chicago is saying farewell to Georg Solti until September. His great coup this season was to get six weeks of concerts from about four weeks of repertory. The trick was repeating the Bruckner Eighth Symphony last autumn and the Beethoven Second Symphony in the winter series in two subscription weeks.

Thursday Solti brought us another hearing of the Beethoven, first presented two Thursdays ago and gave the first half of the concert to Andrzej Panufnik, whose Symphony No. 10, heard in its world premiere, is the first of the scores commissioned to mark the centennial of the Chicago Symphony. Since Solti has had the all week, the reduced responsibilities were welcome.

Wednesday night in Orchestra Hall, when Paul Freeman and the Chicago Sinfonietta played the Beethoven Fifth, you might argue that a small orchestra was trying to sound like a large one. Thursday, with the CSO onstage in force, Solti's apparent objective was to make a large orchestra sound like a small one.

His concept of the Beethoven had changed substantially in two weeks. This performance stressed less intensity of sound, greater delicacy and polish, and made the Beethoven No. 2 a landmark on the road from Haydn to Beethoven's big, romantic scores. I liked the force and drama of the first Solti performance, but I found the second closer to what I believe to be Beethoven's intentions.

Panufnik has had a notable career as both a composer and conductor. Given the CSO, he appeared rather like a driver who suddenly finds himself in charge of an Italian racing car. He is fascinated by how fast it can go, and how well it handles, and gets carried away.

The Concerto for Violin and Strings is an attractive lyric work for the soloist and a small orchestra. Samuel Magad played it with security and eloquence, and the composer provided a sensitive and well-balanced frame for his performance. This work should find a place in the repertory.

The Symphony No. 10 produces mixed impressions and would be best evaluated in a second, and more subtle, performance. This one appeared to be quite episodic, but parts of the score are quite striking and the quiet close is very beautiful. Panufnik is deeply influenced by Stravinsky, whose spirit haunt the score, but it is Stravinsky rethought by a keen and adventurous mind.