Chicago Symphony Thrills, ‘Enslaves’ Capacity Audience

By MARY PERPICH
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Every seat in University Auditorium was filled Friday night as Daniel Barenboim, Jacqueline de Pre and the Chicago Symphony wrapped up Michigan State University’s Beethoven Bicentennial festival in a blaze of symphonic glory.

With Barenboim conducting and his wife, Miss de Pre, as guest cellist, the orchestra went through symphonies by Beethoven and Schumann and a Saint-Saëns violoncello concerto with such sensitivity they brought the massive audience immediately to its feet in appreciation.

As a conductor Barenboim has few equals. His stylish smoothness and tremendous feeling for his music prompted enthusiastic and brilliant responses from the orchestra.

CREATES ‘SLAVERS’

He alternately coaxed and demanded just the right phrasing from his musicians till they and the audience became his slaves, reacting to his every movement.

Watching him conduct Beethoven’s Symphony No. 2, D Major, Opus 36 reminds you of pictures of the composer as a young man, hair flying wildly as he led an orchestra through one of his symphonies.

His interpretation of Schumann’s Symphony No. 4, D Minor, Opus 120, is full of the power and beauty that so dominated the young German’s soul. It moves from the soft strains of the main theme to a thundering conclusion quite naturally and easily with Barenboim in charge.

UNIQUE RENDERING

But it was Miss de Pre that took the audience’s hearts with her unique rendering of the Saint-Saëns concerto.

She is fascinating to watch. Looking almost childlike in her full-length evening gown of purple and green with her long, blonde hair pulled back from her face, the 25-year-old master musician perched on a chair next to her husband and began her thoroughly captivating performance.

And while she played she seemed to go into a trance, caressing the cello lovingly as if it were a newborn child. Eyes closed, head moving gently from side to side, she and her instrument produced beautifully tempered music.

FIVE BOWS

She broke the spell only twice to watch her husband for a cue and smile triumphantly at the orchestra concertmaster. The audience brought her back for five bows before she finally left stage.

This week-long festival is only the second time Barenboim and Miss de Pre have performed on a college campus. They were at the University of Michigan four years ago.

For the Beethoven festival, sponsored by MSU the Lecture-Concert series, Barenboim made his debut as conductor of the Chicago Symphony. From East Lansing he, the orchestra and Miss de Pre go to Chicago for more concerts and recording sessions.