

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

TAKING A BOW

Teen musician's composition gets the pro touch

By RUTH BONAPACE
Special to The Record

Among Tenafly students, 15-year-old Sharon Roffman is well known as an accomplished violinist who has performed on "Sesame Street" and in numerous solo recitals.

But last week, Roffman added a new note to her musical resume, becoming the first and only New Jersey teenager to have an original composition performed by a professional ensemble under the auspices of The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

The audience for the four performances, held last Tuesday and Wednesday at Lincoln Center's Walter Reade Theater, was composed of elementary school and middle-school students from the tristate area. It included a contingent from the Smith School in Tenafly, the public elementary school Roffman attended when she was younger.

Before each concert, Roffman discussed her work onstage with Bruce Adolphe, a compos-

er and education director for the chamber group, and accepted questions from children in the audience.

Adolphe said he interviewed Roffman onstage to impress upon youngsters that creating new music is within their reach.

"This way the kids can see how young she is and how exciting it can be to compose music," said Adolphe. "When they see a young composer, they realize that composing is not a mystery, that it is not only done by old people and dead people. It never occurs to many kids how possible it can be to write music."

Roffman's piece shared a program with Beethoven, Adolphe, and Darius Milhaud, a composer who died in the 1970s.

The series of concerts for school children, called Chamber Music Beginnings, is in its fifth year. This is the first year it has featured the work of young composers.

"It's extremely unusual to

have an ongoing series featuring young composers, and especially where their music is integrated into a normal program. We hope to continue this every year," Adolphe said. Other students selected for the program include David Grosman, 17, of Manhattan, whose piece was performed in November; and Matthew Lima, 18, also of New York, who will make his debut May 3 and 4.

Roffman's piece is titled "Devero," the Russian word for "tree."

"I studied Russian in school, and after I wrote the piece and I heard it in rehearsal, it reminded me of a tree going through the different seasons," said Roffman, a sophomore who will be going to Russia in April as part of a Tenafly High School student exchange program.

The sextet opens with a long mournful bassoon solo.

"It was so exciting to hear my piece performed and to hear it performed so well," Roffman said. "When I heard the bassoon play the part for the first



MEL EVANS

Sharon Roffman, 15, upon hearing her composition: "I thought, 'Wow, I never knew it was so nice!'"

time, I thought, 'Wow, I never knew it was so nice!' I was really happy with the way it turned out."

Roffman, who studies violin at the Manhattan School of Music, was accepted into the Chamber Music Society's composition classes when she was in the eighth grade.

"I still consider myself to be primarily a violinist, and I'll probably go into performance rather than composition," said

Roffman. "But now, after explaining to the musicians exactly what I had in mind when I wrote the piece, right down to very small details, I feel a need to really figure out what the composer originally had in mind when I play the violin."

Last Wednesday, when the Smith School students and teachers had their chance to talk to Roffman onstage, one of the first questions they asked was, "Could you play something

for us on the violin?" So, borrowing violinist Eric Wyrick's instrument, she played a brief excerpt from the Tchaikovsky "Concerto in D Major" to the same thunderous applause she got for her piece.

"It was so funny when they introduced me as being from Tenafly and they all started clapping," Roffman said. "I felt more comfortable with them than any other performance. It was fun."