

MUSIC IN JERSEY

In unity (of line) is strength for heralded young artist

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, Zdenek Macal, conductor. Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35; Sharon Cindy Roffman, violin. Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68, "Pastoral." Heard Thursday in the Count Basie Theater, Red Bank.

By PAUL SOMERS

Sharon Cindy Roffman is a lucky young lady. The luck isn't in her winning the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra's Young Artists Auditions last spring; that was sheer skill and musicality. The luck is in having won it during Zdenek Macal's tenure at the helm of the orchestra. For he has put himself squarely behind the competition by insisting that he conduct the performances which are part of the prize for the winner. Before his arrival the assistant or a guest was usually asked to deal with the inexperienced, though talented, youngster. But Thursday Macal himself stood before the orchestra and supported Roffman at every turn as she tackled Tchaikovsky's "Violin Concerto."

She did herself proud. Even with what one must imagine were some opening-night jitters, there was only one rough patch where her technique abandoned her for a moment. The rest of the time she left the audience in awe of her musical maturity at the young age of 16. A group of local high school students in attendance was amazed.

Roffman has a big sound and a seamless legato. The former is a dime-a-dozen, the latter is not. She spun Tchaikovsky's long lines into a creamy unity which gave the episodic music a unity of style it often lacks.

The enormous technical demands of the piece were met with energy and for the most part accuracy. Her last movement harmonics passage was effective, more relaxed than her tentative touch with the cadenza's harmonics. She burned her way through the passage work as Macal led the orchestra with little adjustment for her youth.

After the strenuous first movement, Roffman had the poise and sense to ask Macal for a chance to retune. Some major artists have been known to ignore that necessity with unfortunate results later.

It was with a sense of relief that the "A" Roffman took was given by principal oboist Carolyn Pollak, back after nearly three months with tendinitis. Her return signalled the first concert in a while with no substitute players in the woodwind section. Principal clarinetist Karl Herman, too, had been out following surgery.

It was eminently noticeable as they played Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony No. 6. Over and again it calls for woodwinds with the emphasis on the wood (vs. more metallic sound). Each time they met the challenge with the kind of exquisite sound, phrasing, and ensemble for which they are noted. Macal gave Herman the first of the solo bows for his way with all the sweet solos with which Beethoven opens the door for the clarinet as the favorite of the Romantics. But F. Tak, bassoonist Robert Wagner and flutist Bart Feller all had their bows as well. The famous bird-call passage was rendered with musicality well beyond the level of avian imitation.

Macal's interpretation is transparent and lucid. He understands the radical element of the music. Never again until the late 20th century minimalists did any composer explore so thoroughly as Beethoven the implications of repetition. Particularly in Macal's hands the subtle variations of each restatement were made plain: colors, dynamic levels, and accenting all in flux revealed Beethoven at his most original.

The Sixth does not function as a flag-waving statement of structure like its two odd-numbered neighbors. Yet its astonishingly tight construction was clearly revealed at every turn as Macal asked for certain details to be emphasized, raising the music far above the level of "Fantasia" picture-book into the realm of first-rate "pure" music.

Yet those pictorial moments were great. The rumbling basses and cellos in the thunderstorm movement were fun to watch, if only to count the number of different fingerings used to cope with the speedy music. Lucinda Lewis' horn calls throughout the work were the very essence of the early Romantic ethos.

So far, Macal's Beethoven performances are the ones I'd wish to own on CD. So why is he recording Gliere?

Star-Ledger (Newark, New Jersey), January 5, 1996



Sharon Cindy Roffman, a star at the age of 16