

MSO concert gives audience taste of the conventional, unconventional

By K.S. Morrison - Special to the Telegraph

A Renaissance man is someone who has expertise in several fields. So what would you call a woman who sings, plays multiple instruments, composes and, yes, even dances? Definitely a curiosity and maybe even a one-woman band.

The featured treat (and trick) at Saturday night's Macon Symphony Orchestra concert was just such a woman. Janice Martin, soprano/violinist/pianist/dancer/arranger, performed her "Paganinimania Concerto" based on Nicolo Paganini's 24th Caprice. Martin's orchestration of this work originally for solo violin added elements of jazz, Celtic, gypsy and even boogie-woogie-style music.

Wonderfully inventive as they were, I would have preferred half as many variations with twice as much development of each style in order to provide more continuity. And, although her violin and piano variations were admirably done, it was distracting to have the soloist exchanging instruments mid-piece as if she were a child prodigy showing off for peers. Her gymnastics/dance routine while singing Gershwin's "Summertime" and simultaneously playing the electric violin was a bizarre spectacle in a Masterworks concert.

Other featured performers were guest conductor Gregory Pritchard and Keitaro Harada, the MSO's assistant conductor.

They displayed different styles of conducting, but both were highly effective communicators.

The overture from Gilbert and Sullivan's "HMS Pinafore," although not demanding from a conducting standpoint, showed that Pritchard would not settle for mere band leading, but was well-grounded in the art of orchestral conducting. Pritchard's technique was of understated physical motion, but managed well the changes and fluctuations of tempo in both the Paganinimania and Kodaly's "Hary Janos Suite." His interpretive sense was tasteful and innovative. He used silences as well as sound as shown in the final bars of the prelude. An extended total cessation of sound highlighted the final, whispered sigh of this movement.

Harada, on the other hand, was at times almost flamboyant in his gestures to the orchestra, yet not in any way ostentatious. Instead, his style was highly expressive. His cues to the individual sections of the orchestra were clear and well-prepared. He brought out both the witty and the noble aspects of Prokofiev's "Love of Three Oranges," yet met the demanding challenges of the demonstrative and dramatic setting of "Spring" by Piazzolla.

The best treat of this program, however, was the encore: the finale of Mozart's clarinet concerto played by Jones County High School junior Anna Darnell. Darnell, a student of Mercer University's Monty Cole, was the winner of last year's MSO concerto competition for young musicians. Her ability to articulate both legato and staccato was professional in quality. Her trills were actually ornamental, as they should be, instead of the heavy structural feel many musicians mistakenly produce. Her phrasing was sensitively shaped, and she was equally accomplished in high

and low ranges of the instrument. She earned a well-deserved standing ovation from the audience.