

ASHEVILLE

CITIZEN-TIMES

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Asheville Symphony Orchestra gives stellar performance

By Martha Fawbush

SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN-TIMES

If the opening concert of the 1998-99 Asheville Symphony Orchestra's Masterworks series is indicative of future performances, expect a year of musical excellence.

Maestro Robert Hart Baker and the ASO were in top form on Saturday evening in Thomas Wolfe Auditorium as they presented a concert of favorites by Brahms, Mozart and Tchaikovsky.

The first work on the program, Brahms' "Variation on a Theme of Joseph Haydn Op. 56" A, received a fresh, enthusiastic performance

illuminating anew all the vibrant melodies and harmonies which make this composition an enduring part of the orchestral repertoire.

The indisputable highlight of the concert was the performance of Mozart's "Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor, K 491," with internationally-known Alan Gampel as piano soloist. This great work, with its sustained tragic mood, its deeply-felt melody and its austere, classical harmony received a superb realization by orchestra and soloist.

Gampel revealed a prodigious technique Mozart would have admired, displaying classical re-

straint and a delicacy of expression greatly enhanced by his ability to execute the brilliant, difficult work demanded throughout the composition.

This great skill especially asserted itself in the cadenzas, in particular the one which concludes the first movement, with its long, dazzling scale passages and brilliant classical ornamentation. The orchestra also responded to the beauty and the musical demands of Mozart's concerto, entering with consistent crispness and delicacy into the frequent musical dialogue with the piano soloist.

Tchaikovsky's "Symphony No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 17 (The Little Russian)," with its oft-repeated Ukrainian folk themes, its highly-rhythmic motives, and its satisfying combination of orchestral colors and modal memories, allowed the ASO to show off a bit. The principal players in the brass and woodwind sections rose brilliantly to the occasion, treating the audience to beautifully-played solo passages within the brilliant context of Romantic harmony, sharply-defined folk rhythms, and evocative melody.