Bela Siki shines through uninspiring Symphony

By STEPHEN FOX

The Houston Symphony Orchestra was quite disappointing to one acquainted with the prerecorded concert. However, perfection has been, I think, farther away from some professional orchestras at times. It seems that the choice of program pieces was not suited to the Houston Symphony. All the works played required extensive precision for adequate performance, and precision seems to be one of the major weaknesses, if not the major weakness, of this group.

Thus, they should not have played Rossini’s “La Gazza Ladra”, Bartok’s Third Piano Concerto, and especially not Brahms’ Second Symphony.

Intersectional precision was decidedly poor, while on the whole, intra-section unity was not bad. However, the violin section seemed, at times, to contradict this statement.

The first violins were the worst offenders, botching frequently in the Brahms. They were even considerably off on the easy-moving sections throughout the program.

The performance of Rossini was totally dumbfounding. Better has been heard from Kansas City. Precision was atrocious and intonation was poor. The woodwind sections gave only mediocre efforts. Pickar rendered a somewhat bland clarinet solo and the flutes and double reeds botched fluently.

Bela Siki, pianist for this concert, is really to be commended. His interpretation of Bartok was marvelous. He was truly the light of the concert. Feeling literally overflowed from his playing. Such a shame it was not a piano concert.

The musicians appeared to be tiring near the end of the concert, for the quality of the Brahms was greatly inferior to that of the first two numbers. Mistakes became quite numerous and tonal quality depreciated tremendously. More noticeable was the overly stringy tone of the cellos and violas.

Possibly the most noticeable fault was the near-total absence of bass. However, this may be some freak occurrence, the fault of plush, extravagant Jones Hall. The bass violins were almost inaudible from the second row and totally such from the rear of the hall.

But be not discouraged by these critical comments. Improvement seems promising; and even if there is no improvement, the symphony is well worth one’s time. Next week’s composers will be Berlioz, Debussy, and Brahms. Go.