'A Frozen Evening' At The Symphony

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Houston experienced its second substitution of conductors last Monday evening, with the corresponding disastrous results. Andre Kostelanetz became ill at the last moment and was replaced by Vladimir Golschmann. The change of conductors brought a corresponding change in the first part of the program, Golschmann choosing to play Weber's Euryanthe Overture in place of two shorter selections Kostelanetz had prepared. A Weber overture at the beginning of any program is cause for a measure of agony.

Sticky Sweet
Soloist for the evening was the young American pianist John Browning in a performance of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto. Mr. Browning's interpretation was slick, sweet, and sticky, tending to feminine daintiness. He has a tendency to sigh and linger where a more purposeful attitude would enhance the music.

Although Browning has technical skill, and we assume resources although he did not demonstrate same, his performance suffered from a too refined approach. Golschmann provided able if uninspired support.

Lack of Cohesion

The major orchestral work of the evening was Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, a huge undertaking even when a conductor has sufficient time for rehearsal. Golschmann did not, and the performance showed it, full of irregularity and bad tempo. There was an attempt to put all the pieces together into some coherent whole, but it too often remained a collection of parts.

All in all, a frozen evening of music for Houston. Sitting through the program was a real effort, even though the Houston audience gifted Browning with five encores. It has become clear that this city's musical audience would shower applause on Carmen Cavallaro playing Joe "Fingers" Carr.