Andre Previn shines in guest stint; deemed right choice for next year

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Ending a three week rest Monday night, the Houston Symphony put its best foot forward before a near capacity house at Jones Hall. Perhaps it was the vacation which brought about the beneficial change, but there were those in the audience who felt that the change of conductor had something to do with it.

Guest conductor Andre Previn directed a sparkling concert and certainly reaffirmed the belief here that he was the right choice for next year's conductor-in-chief post.

Light Brazil

Opening the program was Respighi's Brazilian Impressions, a suite of three movements resulting from the Italian composer's 1927 visit to Brazil, and featuring Respighi's idea of Brazilian rhythms and themes set in the composer's rich impressionistic style. Previn's interpretation was well conceived and the work was, for the most part, cleanly executed by the orchestra. Admittedly not "heavyweight", the piece was nonetheless a satisfying opener.

Viola Shines

Performed next was Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante, with Concertmaster Raphael Fliegel and Principal Violist Wayne Crouse playing the solo parts. The piece is an important one. Lacking the frivolity of earlier Mozart concerti, the Sinfonia features two difficult and finely woven together solo parts with a substantial orchestral accompaniment.

The performance was generally good, and violinist Crouse was particularly outstanding. Unfortunately the violin part was marred by passages of faulty intonation, and in the first part of the allegro maestoso, the soloists' styles simply did not mesh.

But there were some fine moments, such as the lovely second movement and the cadenzas. Previn and the orchestra provided excellent accompaniment, whose effectiveness was lessened only by the noticeable tendency of the strings to rush the tutti passages.

Dramatic Close

The evening closed with Dmitri Shostakovich's best known work, his Symphony No. 5. Previn led the orchestra in a particularly controlled and lucid performance. All of the movements were appropriately presented.

The close of the driving Finale left the audience hungry for more. Unfortunately there won't be more until the symphony takes another three weeks rest.