

Strains of 'musically textured silence'

In the unfamiliar,
DSO finds wealth
of inspiration

By THOMAS LEITCH
Special to The News Journal

Every symphony orchestra constantly faces the challenge of making familiar music sound new.

This past weekend at The Grand, the Delaware Symphony Orchestra turned this challenge on its head by playing a program of three rarely performed works with surprisingly close connections that made them sound familiar.

To introduce the major piece of the evening, Henryk Gorecki's "Third Symphony," Music Director David Amado chose Mozart's "Masonic Funeral Music" and Kurt Weill's "Little Threepenny Suite." The Mozart, somber and brief, provided a foretaste of Gorecki's auditory and spiritual world, from its severe, sparing woodwind cues to its longer, more lustrous string lines.

Amado's use of crescen-

dos and decrescendos to underline the music's subtle ebb and flow provided a further preview of Gorecki's more grandly scaled work.

The intervening black-comic relief, Weill's suite from "The Threepenny Opera," occupies an anomalous place in Americans' musical awareness. Anyone who has been to a wedding in the past half-century knows "Mack the Knife," but the other seven pieces aren't nearly as often played.

The orchestra, reduced to a 17-member wind band, infused the overture with a coolly sardonic edge and sounded appropriately honky-tonk in "The Instead of Song" and the "Cannon Song." Weill's music is more notable for its atmosphere of grotesque parody than its invention, and several of the movements, especially the "Threepenny Finale," sounded repetitive despite their brevity.

Yet the astringent contrast to Mozart's early-blooming romanticism and the offbeat colors supplied by the saxophone, banjo,

accordion, tinkly piano and precisely measured percussion maintained interest throughout.

Gorecki's repetition is of a very different order. His 1976 "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs" is an hourlong tour de force: three slow movements, each based on ostinato figures in which very little happens rhythmically or harmonically.

Yet the result of his impossibly long arcs, painstakingly building and dying away, can be hypnotic. His music, deeply traditional in its tonality yet modern in its daringly minimalist construction, has won a more secure place in the repertoire than any other symphonic score of the past 50 years, and it is no wonder that Peter Weir chose the score as background for the plane crash in the 1993 film "Fearless."

Amado, who used his opening remarks to recall the recent plane crash in which the president of Poland and dozens of the country's military and political elite were killed, aptly described the sym-

phony as "a musically textured silence" in dedicating the symphony to them.

Janice Chandler Eteme was a spellbinding soprano soloist in all three movements, thrilling in her big moments and commanding even in her silences. And the orchestra members, who had to repeat the same musical figures in intricate layers for endless stretches of time, played with such devotion that they made time stand still until the audience exhaled a collective sigh at the end of each movement, as if they had been holding their breath for 20 minutes.

REVIEW