

Woodward renders extraordinary Brahms

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SPECIAL

Australia's Roger Woodward, symphony Nova Scotia's guest artist on their Celebrity Series concert at the Cohn last night, is a volatile pianist with a mercurial touch.

He uses the soft pedal like a paintbrush, and combines it with the sustaining pedal to orchestrate the keyboard.

The resulting coloration of the piano, and the way he blends the piano into and develops it out of the orchestral texture, gave us an extraordinary Brahms Piano Concerto in D minor.

It was, in the slow movement particularly, not just a matter of

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poetry and light. Woodward is one of those rare soloists who plays the score instead of just the piano, and do so in a way that goes a country mile beyond just making suitable connections with the orchestral tutti.

His dynamic range is remarkable. He can play with feathers on his fingertips, or poleaxe the keyboard, as he did in the astonishing fortissimo double-octave passage in the first movement.

The Cohn's aging Steinway, well past its prime, uttered a convincing roar that once, but whether of triumph or of pain is not sure. At any rate it simply gave up after

that, went out of tune, and had to be coaxed not to sound marshy on anything less than three full strings per note.

The orchestra, after playing a sharp-edged, blindingly clean Coriolan Overture (Beethoven's), sounded unsettled and off-balance during the opening passages of the Brahms. Tuning became ambiguous in spots and never did completely settle down.

Yet, after intermission, the players took command in a truly outstanding performance of Beethoven's Third Symphony (The Eroica).

Conductor Georg Tintner's tempi took Beethoven at his word,

the Allegro first movement very much "con brio" as marked, and yielding not an inch to the programmatic implications of the symphony's sub-title, nor the temptation to broaden and ennoble at the expense of the three following movements.

Rather than exhausting the ear by overdoing intensity, Tintner showed us the integrity of the whole structure, and its cumulative power.

The concert is repeated Friday night in the Cohn on the U-Pick series, and Woodward will join the symphony musicians in a chamber music concert on Saturday night in St. Andrew's United Church.