

Symphony soloist proves popular

By NELDA STUCK
Our Town Editor

Review

REDLANDS — The Redlands Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Jon Robertson set their 1990-91 concert season once again in the top echelons of performance with their opening concert Oct. 6 in Memorial Chapel.

In this "Season of Fourths" (gimmicky programming, but certainly a demanding and an anticipated year, hearing eight composers' "Fourth" symphonies), it's going to be a challenge for the orchestra to top Saturday night's performance of Brahms' Fourth.

However, the highlight (and fun) in the evening was the opportunity to hear young pianist John Nauman — one of the winners of last year's increasingly prestigious Palm Desert 11th Joanna Hodges Piano Conference and Competition — in the familiar favorite, the Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 2.

Gone was the long-hair image of musician — replaced by tall 27-year-old Nauman striding onstage with Marinelike crew cut.

He proved to be a popular young

soloist, giving the Romantic concerto themes full warmth (by the third movement gazing rapturously upward in his own emotional involvement).

While those seated down front heard good balance between orchestra and soloist, several others throughout the chapel felt the orchestra too strong at times despite Nauman's full power and sometimes literal beating of the keyboard to bring out all the tone of the concert grand Baldwin brought in for this performance.

Nauman came to Redlands through Robertson's being an adjudicator for the Hodges competition and being impressed there with this young man's talents. He invited the Maryland-New York pianist here to perform the Rachmaninoff work — a concerto Robertson himself has performed at the keyboard and also conducted several times.

Saturday was Nauman's first public performance of this concerto

— one of which he can be justifiably proud. But he is young, and continued success should hopefully visibly relax his stage presence. We were thoroughly enjoying his music, but his facial anguish and stiff shoulders gave pause for concern whether he himself was also enjoying his performance. The demeanor was as though he was displeased with his playing. He need not wait for the rewards of applause to show some joy of being able to share such obvious talent.

A solo encore — much appreciated and in total and very brief, quiet contrast to the drive of the concerto — proved, however, a mystery. The thought was there, but Scriabin's Prelude No. 15 in D Flat Major proved to be a technical exercise in left-hand interval clarity rather than a producer of sighs of appreciation that the choice of any of the limitless gems of encore repertoire would have brought forth.

Robertson's "one more rearrangement" of the string sections resulted in a new sound for the orchestra. Once again the combining of all violins to the left of podium, with violas centered and celli returning to

their more traditional position at front stage right, produced a strong, bright upper strings quality to evening.

The violins fairly shone, and the total strings were rich in the opening Weber Overture to "Euryanthe."

The orchestra easily responded to and reflected the many moods of the Brahms symphony, from the andante's restful themes to solid statements of the passionate fourth movement where the intensity never let up.

The concert season opened once again with the national anthem, which next year should be transposed down to A-Flat in a more singable range.