

My T 5/5/06

MUSIC REVIEW

# Juilliard, Turning 100, Dons Its Party Clothes

By ANNE MIDGETTE

Those assembling the Juilliard School's 100th-anniversary gala faced much the same challenge as a wedding planner: come up with a one-night event that is supposed to serve as a meaningful encapsulation of a continuing life. Of course, a single night is inadequate to the task. The best you can hope for is a happy potpourri, a sequence of snapshots or, ideally, a good party.

On Monday evening, a party is certainly what the school offered, a starry event in its Peter Jay Sharp Theater. The gala's Oscar-like luster was only underlined by a rare live television broadcast on PBS.

The event smacked a bit of the Oscars as well. It was notable that John Williams served as the main conductor, representing perhaps not so much the school's high artistic level as a telegenic presence viewers might recognize. (He conducted respectably, though the final scheduled selection, the first movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto, was a little lackluster.)

Itzhak Perlman played Mr. Williams's "Theme From 'Schindler's List,'" evoking the medley he played at the Oscars last month. Mr. Perlman understands the right tone for this kind of event; he also played Kreisler's "Tambourin Chinois" with an expression of affectionate amusement for this frothy confection.

But it's hard to figure out how to present high art in bite-size, TV-ready dollops. Representing the furrowed-brow element of classical music were the Juilliard String Quartet and Emanuel Ax in the third movement of Brahms's F minor Piano Quintet: white men of a certain age in a passionate performance so intense that bow hairs snapped, and Joel Smirnoff, the first violinist, almost rose out of his chair.

For opera, there was Renée Fleming, singing Tosca's "Vissi d'arte" (a



Nan Melville for The New York Times

Itzhak Perlman with the Juilliard Orchestra, led by John Williams.

## 100th-Birthday Concert Juilliard School

questionable choice both for a celebration and for Ms. Fleming's vocal gifts) followed by "Mercè dilette amiche" from Verdi's "Vespri Siciliani." Ms. Fleming sang gamely and carefully, with a couple of top notes she might have liked to try again, but in general, she looked and sounded lovely.

Artistically, the most substantial segment was the dance department's excerpt from Adam Houghland's "Watershed," set to "Friandises" by Christopher Rouse. Mr. Houghland's hyperactive choreography involved sculptural hand and arm movements, and male dancers spinning their female partners on the floor like ice skaters, all of these linked by Graham-like arcs of leg and body. A continuity of gesture linked the two parts of the dance, an active but gentle pas de deux and a flashy group section, even more than the two parts of Mr. Rouse's music did: one in the mold of Mahler's Adagietto, the other loud, brash and in-

vigorating.

The theater department offered a tantalizing flash of its "Midsummer Night's Dream," whose costumed performers received "notes" in the form of "Hamlet's Advice to the Players" from Kevin Kline.

The jazz department offered a piece by Wynton Marsalis, "Free to Be," for which the television cameras sprang into action, though jazz at Juilliard, still in its pioneering stages, seems to need some freeing up.

And the precollege division was represented by a 13-year-old pianist named Peng Peng with the mien of an amiable puppy, all big feet and big grin, who played the Rachmaninoff concerto in much the same way: with eager virtuosity, energy and a strong touch bordering on heaviness. He should grow admirably into his body and his playing.

But the school's musicians really got to show off in the final scripted encore: the Juilliard Orchestra offered Bizet's "Farandole" (from the Second "Arlésienne" Suite) without a conductor, and did it excellently. Now that's entertainment.