

Choir leaves its mark with Previn in Pittsburgh

By CORLISS BACHMAN
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

The University Concert Choir again won the hearts of audiences and critics when they performed last weekend with Andre Previn and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in Pittsburgh.

All three performances of Carl Orff's "Carmina Burana" received spontaneous standing ovations from near-capacity Heinz Hall audiences.

Previn, music director for the symphony, told the choir, "It's really been terrific. It was nice to show the chorus off."

The performance was filmed by PBS, and will be telecast nationally this spring as part of the "Previn and Pittsburgh" series.

"Carmina Burana," the ovation piece, is a

collection of secular songs from the Middle Ages, celebrating the joys of springtime and young lovers, drinking and adventure.

"Carmina Burana" is a piece that choruses love to do," Previn said. "It gives a chorus a chance to sing full out. A good chorus has fun singing it."

The 24 songs, most of which have three verses, are written in distorted dialects of Latin, German and French. The Penn State choir "is certainly the only chorus I've ever worked with who learned it from memory," Previn said. "That's insane!"

Choir director Raymond Brown and assistant Tommie Irwin train the 200-voice choir each week to prepare them for concerts with Pittsburgh and other symphony orchestras.

"It was just great tonight," Brown said to the choir after the opening performance. "Now you know what it is to be born again. I can't tell you how proud I am of you and what you've done."

The Penn State Choir began their association with the Pittsburgh Symphony in 1969. William Steinberg, then conductor of the orchestra, auditioned and selected the choir to sing the Bruchner "Te Deum."

To date, the choir and symphony together have performed 28 concerts, including the first choral concerts conducted by Previn when he came to Pittsburgh. He explained why Penn State is asked back to Pittsburgh year after year.

"First of all, the choir is just plain very good," Previn said.

"Number two, it's enthusiastic — which I like. They enjoy singing."

In England, where Previn is principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, there is a long, solid tradition of amateur choruses.

"I'm totally used to the enthusiasm that an amateur chorus brings to a performance — and I mean amateur in the French sense, not in the pejorative," Previn said. "I would rather have an enthusiastic amateur chorus than a really hardened professional chorus."

"I think that the (Penn State) chorus is, of university choruses, very high on the list," he said.

A Pittsburgh violinist said, "We're so glad when the choir is here. They really excite us." Previn said the biggest problem he has with

the choir certainly is not musical, but one of logistics. "It's the fact that they aren't with the symphony and can't be here 52 weeks of the year," he said.

The choir travelled to Carnegie Hall in New York in 1973 to perform Beethoven's "Ninth Symphony" with Steinberg and the Pittsburgh Orchestra. Since then, however, their appearances together have been limited to Heinz Hall and the University's Eisenhower Auditorium.

Hinting at plans for possible future concerts, Previn told the choir, "I wish we could go to New York and do something. It would give me great pleasure to show you off in New York. You really sing most wonderfully."

American goes to Africa, rejects system in 'Coups'

By DEBBIE SHEER
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

All through school, the teachers tell us, "Write about what you know." Supposedly, that was the secret to good writing.

Now, well-known American writer John Updike poses as a black African dictator in his latest novel, "The Coup" and succeeds. Perhaps he doesn't succeed in convincing us of any authenticity in the situation. His dictator, Ellellou, is as much Updike as any of the middle-class American heroes in his other novels. The reader, however, comes to realize that this is not a novel about Africa as much as about Americanism, especially about American commercialism.

While the majority of the people in Updike's imaginary nation of Kush starve to death, those who have managed to do well in the urban areas crave brand-name American products, wear American clothing and listen to American music. Ellellou finds no relief from these constant signs of America. His minister of the interior wears a digital watch and synthetic leisure suits, he believes he is not served the hot chocolate he has ordered, but instead, Ovaltine. He is convinced that the government secretaries who he has forbidden to don Western clothes wear elastic American panties under their

African robes.

As his chief minister encourages this Americanization of Kush, Ellellou burns crates of American breakfast cereal while thousands starve and wanders among his people, often as an orange seller with no oranges, then as a digger of wells that yield no water. After this last disguise, he takes the woman with the well-diggers back to his capital, only to have this example of African culture change into a modern woman with a growing appreciation for American tastes.

The book is a series of ironies, ironies that endear you to this dictator and have you laughing at our American materialism. In his past works, Updike characterizes middle-class America, and in this novel, he does it again, by taking a step back as the young Ellellou studying at a small Wisconsin college and as President Ellellou, trying to fight off American influence.

As Updike takes us through his main character's present life and through his four years of college in the states, you don't ask "what does this white American know about being black or African?" Instead, while Updike switches back and forth between third person omniscient and first person narrator, we see Ellellou from inside and out, not as an African leader, but as an American.



Billionaire drama

The secluded life of Howard Hughes inspired playwright Sam Shepherd to write "Seduced," which opened in New York City earlier this month. Rip Torn plays the Hughes-based character.

Why a 'Rocky' fan keeps returning for more horror

By PAM MEDVE
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

As a kinky novelty, my friends and I dressed last Halloween weekend and went to see "Rocky Horror Picture Show." We stood in line, wondering about the strange songs that some of the most strangely-dressed people were singing.

Obviously, most in the crowd were not Rocky virgins, as we were. They sang and danced, throwing in quoted comments as if they had been in the movie themselves. After waiting an hour and a half outside, the line at last began to move. Inside the theater, I knew something excitingly different was beginning when a pair of sensuous lips slowly reddened the screen. The audience became delirious.

I soon felt myself back in the days of vaudeville. People yelled comments in reply to the movie dialogue. They sang the songs loudly. I sat awed by several of the more erotic comments, yet fascinated by the bizzariness of it all.

Doing the Time Warp in the aisles, feeling a skidding thrill as I watched Frank N. Furter gavoette in his stockings and suspender belt, all eyes absorbing the color, professional polish, and activity... it could have been just another strange movie like "Young Frankenstein" or "Monty Python's Holy Grail." Yet, "Rocky Horror" had an extra. It

was elastic, flexible. I could almost see the audience reflected on the screen.

That was the magic — being taken in under the spell. If I had tried to hold myself apart, the movie would have lost all significance.

Particularly, the movie was absorbing because everyone has some of Brad and Janet and also Frank N. Furter in them. Who doesn't want to give themselves over to "ultimate pleasure" like Frank N. Furter? Yet, most people are still at least vaguely conscious of the traditional social standards and morals as Brad and Janet were.

The movie definitely casts a spell, as is demonstrated by the loyal devotion of some of its fans. ("How many times have you seen 'Rocky Horror'?" "Twenty-nine," someone answers.) As for me, the words of the "Time Warp" kept blasting in my head when I was taking my finals.

Everytime I think of "Rocky Horror", I'll remember when I saw Frank N. Furter's outrageous shoes in the elevator before he came on the screen, listening and later hearing myself scream dirty comments, playing the soundtrack countless times, reliving that fantasy so absorbing that anyone could happily lose himself in it. It was great to be so weird — for a little while, at least.



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