

# ISO deftly shows why these are 'Symphonic Hits'

By Jay Harvey

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The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra's Classical Series, the paterfamilias of its concert clan, has introduced a fun-loving kid brother called "Symphonic Hits."

Shifted a half-hour earlier and bookended with "Sound Off" and "Reverb," opportunities to schmooze and pick up a little knowledge informally, "Symphonic Hits" debuts with this weekend's concerts. Being a close relative, it shares many traits with the rest of the series; it's just a bit more hail-fellow-well-met than the kinfolk.

Discounted main-floor tickets no doubt helped fill most of the seats the performers can see easily from the stage, so everyone benefited from feeling they were going with a winner. Add to that mostly familiar music and you have instant rapport.

On Friday, Swiss conductor Matthias Bamert showed why the selections are truly warhorses, not nags.

Garrick Ohlsson, who plays Chopin as well as anybody, was on hand to work his magic upon the Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor. This was very "public" Chopin; even its intimate moments had breadth. Ohlsson's

bell-like sonority, well-rounded but not precious phrasing, effective rubato and emotional restraint displayed the budding genius of the 19-year-old who wrote the piece.

The rest of this weekend's program is Russian. The curtain-raiser, Shostakovich's "Festive Overture," is the kind of work that sounds familiar even if you've never heard it before. It's noisy and obvious in many ways, but flecked with sly, tense episodes, as when pizzicato strings are nuzzled softly by the snare drum. Bamert led a performance that made the piece as worth hearing as it ever is.

After intermission came the Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 5 in E minor. You didn't have to wait anxiously for the evergreen horn solo in the second movement, which Robert Danforth delivered enchantingly. There was plenty to enjoy from the first, starting from the full tone in the brooding lower strings during the first-movement introduction.

The third-movement "Valse" had some loose ends, but everything else showed the orchestra's responsiveness to the podium guest. Though the ISO may have already lost those super-pianissimos it was able to come up with under Mario Ven-

## INDIANAPOLIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

**Who:** Matthias Bamert, conductor; Garrick Ohlsson, piano soloist.

**Where:** Hilbert Circle Theatre, 45 Monument Circle.

**When:** 7:30 p.m. today (remaining performance).

**Tickets:** \$20-\$50 at the box office, (317) 639-4300.

**Bottom line:** "Symphonic Hits" knows how to work the room.

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zago, the Swiss conductor it used to have, this one drew great dynamic range from the orchestra.

★ Call Star reporter Jay Harvey at (317) 444-6402.