



GEOFF ROBINS, GUELPH MERCURY

The Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony rehearses yesterday afternoon in Guelph for its evening performance using the River Run Centre's new acoustic shell.

# Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony serves up musical feast in Guelph

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RECORD STAFF

The Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony opened its Guelph Symphony Series yesterday with a delectable program titled *A Feast of Brahms*.

At the River Run Centre, under the newly installed acoustic shell, the more mellow sonorities couldn't have arrived at a better time. Brahms' late romantic, large-orchestra music wasn't given a chance to blast or diffuse. Instead, as the composer intended, it glowed under Maestro Martin Fischer-Dieskau's thoughtful direction. For an attentive audience of some 300 patrons, the program was a wonderful mix of the richness of Brahms' imagination and the intimacy of a smaller-scale, now much improved hall.

As Fischer-Dieskau lowered his baton into the initial phrases of Brahms' *Tragic Overture*, faces throughout the venue changed expression. Some relaxed, some smiled; others took on a rapt affect. Yes. The new stage arrangement was a good idea, because as the overture progressed, it was clear that the players blended extremely well. With the baffling of the new shell, they could hear each other and respond to the conductor in a nano-second.

What Fischer-Dieskau and the players accomplished with this overture, and throughout the evening, was unity. Fischer-Dieskau interpretations are often tighter and more rigid than others would dare. At the same time, he has an incredibly delicate, caressing way with how Brahms' phrases dovetail and cross-rhythm. Listening and being musically empathetic is what Fischer-Dieskau and the Kitchener-Waterloo

Symphony do so well. This was most obvious in the vocal partnership forged between the symphony and Gerald Neufeld's Guelph Chamber Choir.

In the redolent *Schicksalslied*, the 37-member chorus sounded warm and well-prepared. This is taxing vocal music, with suspensions and close harmonies, yet Neufeld had clearly tutored his singers in terms of the economy of breath and keen listening.

Perhaps what separates an impressive conductor from the vast legions of the hum-drum isn't how well he or she manages a huge group of specialist technicians, but in the way he or she values and handles the stasis. Those sometimes long sections where apparently nothing happens are there for a reason, and are so often misunderstood.

While everyone else seems to want to get on with the action bits, it's a handful like Fischer-Dieskau who knows the real artistry is in the suspense. Why isn't the harmony moving? Listening to Fischer-Dieskau conducting Brahms' *Third Symphony*, it's because something else much more subtle is taking place in the voicing, or the overlapping rhythmic patterns, or quite often, the mood.

There's an ethereal aspect to every Brahms score, where the music transcends the time and place. Capturing that requires intense dedication from an orchestra, and a fine appreciation for the tidy bits which link one section to another.

So, Guelph now has its very own Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony concert series, and a refurbished hall. With nearly every one of the 675 possible seats filled, it definitely has support.