I left Saturday's concert by the MIT Symphony Orchestra with the feeling that the orchestra had reached its potential that night, a shame given the considerable abilities of its members.

The first piece was the Overture to Mozart's Cosi fan Tutte. Played slowly and, lacking the saucy timing essential to an effective rendition of this piece, the result was lackluster, and drugged.

The impression of the orchestra not quite getting there continued with the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 5. But, there was some exceptional playing in the solo sections; the strings developed a uniquely beautiful approach to playing piano which I have noted at earlier concerts. At the same time, the sound seemed to flow almost naturally. And the build-up to the crescendos at the end of the movement was exciting.

Saturday Theodore Letinsky established himself in a deeply thoughtful, detailed performance of this work. Every note had a new angle to it. His approach, though precise and studied, was completely fresh. It is an approach to Beethoven which I like: unplumbed, its power comes from a lyrical exploration of all the subtleties of the work, coupled with a first control.

In the second movement, the most effective orchestral playing of the evening was achieved. After an exceptionally sensitive piano introduction, the strings entered smoothly, their balance with the piano just right, to create an atmosphere of mystery, of serenity, of time-stopping peace. Letinsky's fine playing continued to the end, though there were patches of ignoble in parts of the orchestra during some passages of the third movement.

Unpreparedness showed through most in the final piece, Brahms' Symphony no. 2. There was a lack of cohesion at several points that really was rather worrying. The introduction of the cellos in the first movement was firm, and there was some interesting coloration in the strings in general. But, certainly once the second movement arrived, the whole was, if anything, less than the sum of the parts. In the third movement there were noticeable problems among the woodwinds, though there was one passage where the strings rendered that magical, serene effect I had admired earlier on. As we entered the fourth movement, there was more sloppiness, unctuously playing, unfortunately persisting to the end.

There may be lessons to be learned from this kind of experience. Excellent though the MIT Symphony Orchestra is, its members are not professionals but, in the main, college students with a lot of things on their minds other than music.

The BSO might be able to get by with two rehearsals with a guest conductor, but the MIT Symphony cannot. The conductor, Frances Steiner, had rehearsed the orchestra for only two or three two-hour sessions (following more extensive preparation under Neal Stulberg). I really wonder, under these circumstances, whether there is more of a case for inviting guest conductors than in perpetuating a deep, doggedly, continuing relationship with one individual from first rehearsal to final performance. I do hope that this fine orchestra addresses issues such as these, and that we are not disappointed again.

Jonathan Richmond

**MIT Symphony falls short of expectations**

**ON THE TOWN**

**The Early Music Series of the Museum of Fine Arts presents a concert of sonatas by J.S. Bach at 7pm on Nov. 2 and 9. Performers are the Boston Museum Trio. Tickets are $8, $5 for students, and include admission to the museum. For information, call 267-9300, x340.**

**The Boston Classical Orchestra, F. John Adams music director, will perform works by Haydn, Bach and Mozart in Fenway Hall on Nov. 5 at 8pm. For information, call 426-2387.**

**The John Oliver Choral, Boston's virtuosic chorus of 32 voices, will perform Bach's Christmas Oratorio in Jordan Hall at 8pm on Sat., Nov. 2. For more information, call 964-4974.**

**The Peking Opera is at Boston's Schubert Theatre for a two-week engagement (through Nov. 2). This show, a major breakthrough in cultural exchange between the US and China, is a composite of singing, dancing, acrobatics, mime, magic and art. Performances are Tuesday through Saturday at 7:30pm with matinees Saturday and Sunday. Box tickets and information, call 426-6520.**

**The Opera Company of Boston will be performing Manon. The performance at 8pm on Oct. 31 and 8pm (sunday) on Nov. 1. The audience is advised to bring equipment to deal with any contingencies that might arise, such as garlic and crowns. Tickets from $8. Call 426-5300.***

**The MIT Shakespeare Ensemble is pleased to present the final performance of The Comedy of Errors tonight at 8:30pm in the Sala de Puerto Rico. Tickets are $4 ($3 with college ID) and may be reserved by calling 11-2903.**

**The Material Object, a collection of sculptures by Tom Bills, John Gibbons, Roni Horn and Nichols Parson, is currently on display in The Hayden Gallery. The Gallery is open daily 10 to 4, and 6 to 9pm on Wednesdays.**

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