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Quint casts his brilliant light on Korngold

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REVIEW

Portland Symphony Orchestra

Where: Merrill Auditorium

When: March 2

and once said to me that Benedetti Michelangeli's playing made Rachmaninoff better than it was. The same was said for Philippe Quint's performance of the Korngold Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D major (opus 35) with the Portland Symphony Orchestra, before a performance at Merrill Auditorium on Monday.

Quint is a phenomenal violinist, and he plays the most difficult cadenzas with ease, and whose tone soars over the most fortissimo orchestral passages. Surprisingly enough, Korngold's concerto sounds almost like Prokofiev on a sentimental day.

Quint was praised by Mahler and generally considered the new Mozart. Then he died in Hollywood, and was suddenly

Although we have heard several of his classical works recently in Maine, he is best known as a composer of film scores. It is customary to call him the last of the Romantic composers, like Rachmaninoff, but the concerto, written in 1945, seems to me to be exploring new directions, albeit tentatively.

It starts off sounding like the music to "Gone with the Wind," with the violin doing character sketches. When the cadenza occurs, however, the movie music takes a back seat to some much more modern-sounding harmonies and explorations of timbre. The final movement of the

concerto sounds almost like Prokofiev on a sentimental day.

The entire concerto is well-written, with a very satisfying violin part, for which Quint earned an enthusiastic standing ovation. It might be worthwhile to hear more Korngold. Like several other noted composers of his era, he wrote a piano concerto for the left hand alone to be played by Paul Wittgenstein, a pianist who had lost his right arm in World War I.

Maestro Toshiyuki Shimada began the program with the "School for Scandal" overture of Samuel Barber. He dedicated the fine performance to one of his teachers, Lawrence Christianson, who died this week.

The Sibelius Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, which concluded the evening, gave many of the orchestra's principals a chance to shine, especially the self-standing clarinet solo over a drum roll that begins the work,

played brilliantly by Thomas Parchman. My recording of this work is of the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy. The Portland Symphony's rendition was more exciting.

Perhaps it was because live performance provided the opportunity for tympanic shocks that are impossible on recordings, or maybe the orchestra is just becoming that good. At any rate, all of the woodland spirits of the far North were in full cry. I generally prefer the infinite crescendo of the Symphony No. 2, or the Niagara-like undertones of the Fifth, but the mythic voices that could be heard on Tuesday may require rethinking that opinion.

Christopher Hyde's Classical Beat column appears in the Maine Sunday Telegram.