

Messiaen's 'Turangalila' inspires states of rapture

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**Music
Review**

If I were to drop a few hints about a certain composer — that he was fascinated by symmetries and palindromes, numerology, isorhythm, paradoxes, cosmic organi-

zation and the inherent songfulness of nature, that his music is deeply influenced by Roman Catholicism, that it's infused with arcane symbols, idiosyncratic mysticism, and vivid poetic visions — it probably wouldn't take long to converge on someone from the Middle Ages. But it would surely diverge again with the mention of unprecedented orchestral color and cataclysmic fortissimos, and with a final clue, birdsong, it should

become clear that the only composer to whom this all applies is the 20th-century French master Olivier Messiaen. Maybe a couple of times in one's life, one hears a live performance of his overwhelming orchestral litany, the "Turangalila Symphony." One of these opportunities came last night, when the Carnegie-Mellon Philharmonic performed it in Symphony Hall.

Miraculously, this work can leave you both still and exhilarated, speechless and frantic to harness a gush of words and images. It's all about states of rapture, and it is actually one itself. I challenge anyone, no matter how unsympathetic to modern music, to get through it without being moved to some higher state. The "Turangalila" is where the absolutely elemental blends seam-

CARNEGIE-MELLON
PHILHARMONIC

Juan Pablo Izquierdo, conductor
At: *Symphony Hall, last night*

lessly with the grandly sophisticated. Conductor Juan Pablo Izquierdo led his orchestra in a very convincing performance. The orchestra of students from Carnegie-Mellon University didn't so much as flinch at the piece's formidable difficulties. I've only heard one other live performance, and I recall being overly conscious of how hard it was to play. But last night, difficulty was never a distraction. Even when it was clear that a nonprofessional orchestra was playing, it wasn't an issue, and beginning with the insanely complex "Introduction," it was clear that

daunting problems had been dealt with squarely in rehearsal.

In addition to the significant part written for Ondes Martenot, that proto-electronic keyboard instrument responsible for so many eerie effects in science fiction movies of the '50s, the symphony has a role for piano of concerto proportions. Pianist John Root handled it with enviable skill. With Messiaen, sooner or later you get birds, and the sixth of the 10 movements, "Jardin de sommeil d'amour," casts the piano as an aviary. Root's playing was just right — clearly painting a tone portrait with birdsong, but just as clearly art, not nature tapes. More than any compositional fetish ever, Messiaen's birds walk the treacherous line between mimicry and invention, and they convince in both categories.