

A2SO does right by Fetler, 'birds'

REVIEW

BY ROGER LELIEVRE
The Ann Arbor News

It wasn't just warm outside Saturday night; warmth was everywhere to be found inside the Michigan Theater thanks to a superb performance by the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra.

The obvious buzz was over the A2SO's performance of Paul Fetler's Violin Concerto No. 2, the second piece on the program, being recorded for commercial release on the major Naxos label (two more of Fetler's works will also be recorded this season). **That's a major feather in the ensemble's cap** and it seemed as if the symphony was especially pumped up for the occasion.

As Fetler's almost 30-min-

ute piece began, I wasn't sure what to make of it – the work seemed oddly discordant – but all doubts were quickly put to rest. It proved a wonderful work for the violin, especially with soloist Aaron Berofsky playing with great feeling, particularly in the second movement, which took a theme from the first and developed it more intimately. As the work drew to a close – a race of instruments chasing each other, often playfully, to the finish – **I realized I was so caught up in the music I had been holding my breath.**

Composer Fetler, 87, who was in the audience, took a well-deserved bow after the work ended, and I couldn't help but wonder what he was feeling at such a heady moment, although the pleased look on his face did provide some clue.

Meanwhile, Johann Strauss Jr.'s Overture to "Die Fledermaus" (or "The Bat"), proved a perfectly festive way to start a program called "Bird's Eye View." The orchestra was in fine form here as well, with the strings sounding particularly warm. The second half of the program, featuring the gorgeous melodies of Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake," Op. 20, again found those rich strings fully evident. As conductor Arie Lipsky pointed out in the pre-concert lecture, "Swan Lake" is written in such a way that audiences can even hum along.

Not so the program closer, "The Firebird Suite," by Stravinsky. This one is more violent, often darker, but no less delightful, particularly the movement titled "The Infernal Dance of King Kastchei" and the horn solo that shows up at the end.