

**Concert Review by Graham Hollett, with Andre Raphael Smith,
guest conductor – mrwordsmith@msn.com – February 17,
2007**

The opening selection of the evening's performance was *The Chairman Dances*, by American minimalist composer John Adams. This exquisite piece, an out-take from Adams' 1985 opera *Nixon in China*, was a delightful adventure in minimalism, a modern genre for which John Adams is most noted.

The repetitive rhythms and chugging pulse in the bass section created a sort of mantra where you wished the intoxicating rhythms wouldn't end. Suddenly, and with an abrupt end to the slow harmonic rhythms to which we had become accustomed, the tempo changed and the mood shifted from a stately dinner scene to a Foxtrot where Chairman and Madame Mao danced to the music of an aged gramophone, with all the flaws of this early technology simulated by the orchestra.

The piece ended with the use of sandpaper blocks simulating the scratching of the phonograph needle in the final grooves of the record.

This was an excellent choice to open the concert and, even though arcane, was very well received.

The next selections were from the incidental music of Felix Mendelssohn's **A Midsummer Night's Dream**. This familiar piece was well conducted and well performed. In view of that, only a few comments about Mendelssohn's musical genius and superior craftsmanship seem appropriate.

Opening with the well-known *scherzo*, Mendelssohn introduces the fairy world of elfin characters in an enchanted forest. The *scherzo* was followed by the romantic *intermezzo* with the strings

portraying all the anguish you would expect from a distraught youth searching for her bewitched lover.

Mendelssohn uses the French horns in the *nocturne* to signal that Puck, the primary character, has been commanded to rectify a troublesome situation he has caused with the other characters that lie asleep in the forest. *A Dance of Clowns*, a light fanfare primarily of drums and flutes, was a reprise of the “Donkey Dance” from the *Overture*.

The Mendelssohn selections concluded with the ever popular *Wedding March* and its dramatic flourish of the brass section we have grown to know and love.

Brahms Symphony No. 2 in D Major was his most popular symphony of the four movement structure, although the influence of Beethoven is hard to ignore.

It was as if the symphony was composed out of doors to depict a cheerful “Pastoral” setting with the nature metaphor in the horns and winds, not unlike Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony. Likewise, the orchestral explosions in the fourth movement had a flavor of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony.

The animated conducting of Maestro Andre Raphael Smith was successful in capturing the moods of each of the four movements.

The musical conclusion to the evening was an encore, Brahms’ Hungarian Dance No. 5 in G minor. This very lively and popular dance tune has been used for background music in movies, cartoon shows and even a video game. The audience loved it.