

New baton for Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony

Conductor's debut stresses orchestral democracy

KITCHENER — The stage was otherwise empty when Martin Fischer-Dieskau walked out to greet his audience at Kitchener's Centre-in-the-Square over the weekend.

And as soon as the prolonged welcoming applause died down, the new conductor the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra had imported from Germany opened his first season in the city once known as Berlin in a surprising manner.

"This," he announced, "is the sound of one conductor."

And with those seven words he described a soundless arc in the air with his baton.

A theatrical touch? Undoubtedly. A symbolic one as well, signifying the new maestro's baton-waving credo. Without the players, he seemed to be saying, a conductor is rendered mute. A symphony orchestra must be a collaborative enterprise.

The Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra obviously agrees, because in hiring the son of the famous baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau over

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124 other candidates as successor to Japan's Chosei Komatsu, management and players also changed their resident maestro's title from music director to principal conductor.

Fischer-Dieskau may give voice to the final word in hiring and firing, but he shares responsibility for programming with others, including the players, in a more democratically structured orchestra than most.

It should prove interesting to follow the progress of this Kitchener-Waterloo model as symphony orchestras elsewhere struggle with problems of declining attendance, aging audiences and hierarchical administrative procedures.

For the moment, though, all ears — regionally, at least — are focused on Martin Fischer-Dieskau as an inter-

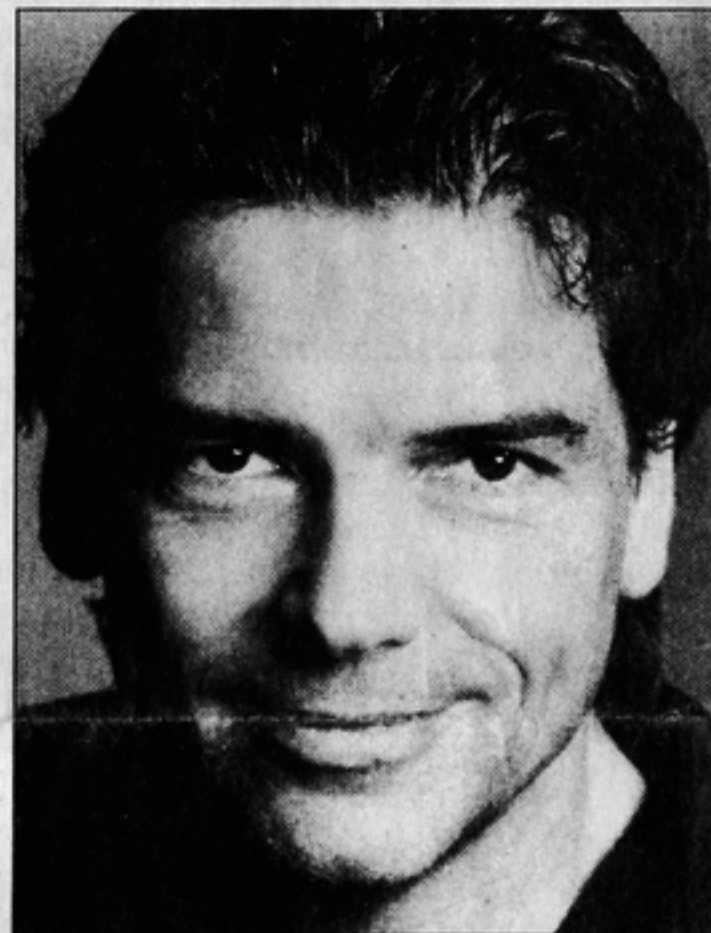
pretive musician and to give those ears something worth listening to, he opened his inaugural season with one of the greatest works in the orchestral literature, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*.

Equally interestingly, he paired it with a work from a portion of that literature entirely new to him by opening the concert with *Symphony No. 1 "de Joie"* by the orchestra's newly appointed director of contemporary music, Winnipeg-born Glenn Buhr.

Since both works are, at least in part, vocal celebrations of joyfulness, the pairing made thematic sense, although the vocal component of Buhr's 25-minute score took the form of a pair of narrators (Margaret Sweatman, who also wrote the text, and the versatile actor Colin Fox).

Augmenting the words and music with lighting effects and electronically manipulated ambient sounds, including those of children playing, Buhr has produced a multi-textured score but one whose diversity of effects turned out to be more notable than its actual ideas or their development.

For the Beethoven *Ninth*, the orchestra assembled a fine all-Canadian quartet of soloists (soprano Donna Brown, mezzo-soprano Laura Pudwell, tenor John McMaster and bass Gary Relyea), together with an enor-



MARTIN FISCHER-DIESKAU

mous choir of 200-odd voices drawn from the Kitchener Waterloo Philharmonic Choir and Youth Choir, the Menno Singers, Renaissance Singers and DaCapo Chamber Choir.

A community statement? Obviously. And Fischer-Dieskau, who conducted in a visually legible and musically straightforward manner, energized his community forces to produce a very solid if unexceptional account of the score.