

New World Symphony, A Youthful Conduit

By JOHN ROCKWELL

The New World Symphony calls itself America's National Training Orchestra. But the ensemble, of which Michael Tilson Thomas is "founding conductor and artistic adviser," now also counts as Miami's principal orchestra, with the demise several years back of the Florida Philharmonic.

The New World Symphony is full sized but confined to players between the ages of 21 and 30. The idea is that they go on to fully professional orchestras, and although the symphony gave its first formal concert only in early 1988, 33 have already done so.

Whatever their musical gifts, however, players need instruments to play, and this orchestra's programs come decorated with fine print crediting and promoting Yamaha and Deegan instruments. But any training orchestra will inevitably make a sound inferior to top-of-the-line orchestras like those of Boston, Philadelphia or New York.

On Thursday night, Mr. Thomas brought his band to Carnegie Hall for its first New York concert. The result was impressive in spots, a little shy of the big time in others. But it was good enough to give hope for the future — both for musical life in Miami and for this ensemble's function as a conduit to other orchestras.

The most interesting, and best played, piece of the night came first.

Charles Wuorinen's "Bamboula Beach — the Miami Bamboula" was commissioned for the New World Symphony's inaugural concert and is part of a bamboula-titled series of what the composer calls "otherwise musically unrelated works of mine which all share a certain lightness of spirit."

In other words, this former chief polemicist for uncompromisingly tough, dissonant, serious music has lightened up his act. Or tried to. This "Bamboula" offers all manner of splashy percussion parts, and there is indeed a certain wit in its nervously nimble leaping from idea to idea and in its general racket.

But Mr. Wuorinen retains the characteristic, or characteristic flaw, of his earlier music: an unwillingness to let an idea unfold at a pace at which it can be savored and contemplated. Mr. Wuorinen is an intellectual June bug, darting this way and that, albeit with an impressive instinctive coherence and consistency. There is a fascination, even sometimes a pleasure, in darting with him. But one wishes, whether he is trying to be earnest or merry, that he could just relax.

The rest of the program consisted of what was billed as the first New York performance of the complete score of Aaron Copland's "Appalachian Spring" ballet score for Martha Graham in its full-orchestra version, and Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. Completeness is all the fashion nowadays, but so is reduced orches-



Michael Tilson Thomas, who is the founding conductor and artistic adviser of the New World Symphony.

trations. It was good to hear "Appalachian Spring" in its richer dress. The New World strings made soft, sweet sounds, and Mr. Thomas caught the rapt mood of the beginning and end beautifully. But Mr. Copland's elimination of "those sections in which the interest is primarily choreographic," as a note in the score of the suite says, was the right idea. Twenty minutes of this lovely folk-flavored music is wonderful; 35 minutes is 15 minutes too much.

Mr. Thomas, who has been recording the Beethoven symphonies in chamber-orchestra versions, here addressed the Seventh with a full ensemble, flush with repeats, in a performance that lasted some 43 minutes. Except for a lively, driven final movement, it was pretty ordinary and — apart from a distinctive first oboe — the playing was ordinary, too, with weak and muddled interior lines and a thick, mushy texture over all.