

Classical meets rock mode

By JAY JOSLYN

A lot of mental cobwebs were blown away when Sigmund Snopek III premiered his "Roy Rogers Meets Einstein" at the Metropole Theater Thursday night.

The happy fusion of classical percussion and rock drive was the featured work on the Milwaukee 20th Century Ensemble program.

Artistic director and conductor Pavel Burda filled the Metropole arena stage with an elaborate array of percussion instruments that surrounded two violinists and inventive tenor saxophonist John Kirchberger.

To the right of the stage was Snopek amid an impressive electronic display, along with his combo's bass, traps and a sideman on harmonica.

Drive was the essence of the piece as Snopek pitted traditional percussive sounds against the familiar rhythms, synthesized chords and vocals of rock — all within the emotional contrast of shifting rhythmic patterns.

Peaks of interest were achieved in Kirchberger's brilliant improvisations.

The vocals, wailed and shouted over the dense sound and rebounded through echo chambers, encompassed a humorous cowboy lament by Byron Wiemann III and a paean to light by Cynthia Dalke.

The diverse poetic approaches were emphasized by actors representing the piece's title roles who entered the room, met and played a game of chess.

The meager theatrical touch was no less superfluous than some of the fragmented aural episodes in Elliott Carter's Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello and Harpsichord, which opened the concert.

Apparently afraid of being overpowered by his colleagues, harpsichordist Jeffrey Hollander abused his instrument to produce an ugly banging noise.

The same combination of instruments augmented by clarinet and violin was more successful in the dramatic, dancing chamber concerto by Manuel de Falla.

The program was concluded with Edgar