

The earth moves for Entremont

BY HILLARY HAUSER

Celebrated pianist/conductor Philippe Entremont has been all over the world performing for all sorts of audiences in all sorts of circumstances, but never has he had such an unusual greeting as the one he got when he arrived this week in Southern California.

The ground shook. He was in his room at a hotel in Costa Mesa at the time.

"It was the aftershock, a five," Entremont said.

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Entremont said. "I was calling my wife in Paris. I call it a rousing welcome."

The French conductor, who will lead the Dresden Philharmonic at 8 p.m. Saturday at the Arlington Theater in a concert sponsored by the Community Arts Music Association, exhibits humor, spontaneity and a down-home, unspoiled view of his own very brilliant career. Speaking by phone from his Costa Mesa hotel room, he was warm, funny and relaxed, despite a very long flying schedule from Dresden to Frankfurt to Los Angeles. He said the news of the L.A. earthquake was announced to the passengers by the pilot somewhere mid-flight. Having experienced a very strong earthquake in Tokyo last October, he said he was beginning to feel "like an expert."

For years Entremont has been known as a fine pianist with a deeply romantic flair. Aspiring pianists have been known to study his numerous recordings for inspiration as to how certain compositions might be performed. ("That's too bad," Entremont joked, when he was told this.) In the 1970s, in the middle of an already-busy concert career, Entremont began to conduct.

"I was asked by Columbia Records to do some Mozart concertos," Entremont recalled. "They asked if I could conduct

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Pianist Philippe Entremont will conduct the Dresden Philharmonic Saturday night at the Arlington.

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from the keyboard. I think you will find they wanted to save money. I did it, it felt good, and it went on."

When the Vienna Chamber Orchestra asked him to guest conduct for a tour of Europe, Entremont said, "Why not?" and the resulting tour was very successful. When the orchestra's permanent conductor resigned for health reasons three months later, Entremont was asked to take the baton.

"They had 145 applicants," Entremont recalled. "I wasn't one of them. But my name came on the first ballot. They called me, I had three months to think about it." He was subsequently appointed lifetime music director of the orchestra. "They cannot fire me," Entremont said.

In addition to leading the Vienna Chamber Orchestra on a 17-city U.S. tour in early 1993, Entremont assumed the post of conducting the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra. He also has a very full guest-conducting schedule with significant orchestras around the world. His Santa Barbara appearance with the Dresden Philharmonic is one stop of that orchestra's 14-city U.S. tour, the first tour of the U.S. the group has made since 1909. The Dresden Philharmonic is a historically important orchestra that in the very good old days was led by Brahms, Dvorak and Tchaikovsky (who often conducted as a way of putting their own work before the public). The illustrious lineup of more recent conductors includes Kurt Masur, Seiji Ozawa, Klaus Tennstedt and Mstislav Rostropovich.

Entremont figured his musical career today is divided 60/40: 60 percent conducting, 40 percent piano. The two are compatible "because they have the same musical approach," he said. "The piano is a big instrument, not like a violin with one or two notes. Piano pieces are very big. Being a pianist is very much like being a conductor."

Entremont cannot be far from a piano for very long. His hosts in Costa Mesa, in fact, had a small Steinway installed in his hotel suite. For him it is not so much a matter of practicing as it is access to the keyboard, the ability to play, that counts.

Entremont said the most exciting conductor he has ever performed with, as a pianist, was Leonard Bernstein, American-



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born composer, teacher, lecturer, writer of books, and long the inspired conductor of the New York Philharmonic. Entremont performed the world premiere of Bernstein's "Age of Anxiety" (Symphony No. 2) with Bernstein conducting, and in June 1993 he returned to New York to play the work with Leonard Slatkin conducting that orchestra in its 150th anniversary celebration. What Entremont remembers most about the late composer/conductor is his sincerity. "Bernstein was a genius," Entremont said. "Composers are not always good conductors, but he was both. I am very grateful to have played with him. We miss him a lot."

As a conductor he has learned the most from the late Eugene Ormandy, conductor for over 40 years of the Philadelphia Orchestra. "I watched him for years," Entremont said. "He had a way of keeping things together, making musicians play well, of making his own sound." He said he was also inspired by the con-

troversial but brilliant Herbert von Karajan, whom he described as a "giant" and "impressive in every way."

The tyrannical quirks and rages of some conductors being legendary, Entremont said he cannot say if he scares any of his players, but he thinks "the new generation of conductors is more human." His own life is very calm. ("I'm a regular guy — boring!"). He lives with his wife of 39 years, Andree, in Paris. Their two children are "out of the house" — a daughter, 30, runs a boutique, and a son, 24, studies medicine. Neither child studied or studies music — "this is wonderful!" Entremont said.

Entremont's typical day begins very early. He has breakfast in bed ("I cannot stand eating breakfast at a table!"), and in bed he does a lot of his work — studying scores, preparing programs, reading his mail. After a morning practice session at his piano he has lunch, usually with his daughter. "My wife doesn't go, she never has lunch." A nap in

the afternoon, then more work in the evening.

This schedule is the rule for Paris, but Entremont admits he is seldom there. "I am always on the road," he said. "I like it, it's my life. My wife goes with me a lot." (Andree Entremont will join her husband for two weeks of the Dresden Philharmonic's U.S. tour.) The Entremonts once owned a home in Vienna, but now they have simplified life by staying in a hotel when he is there conducting the Chamber Orchestra.

In Santa Barbara, Entremont will lead the Dresden Philharmonic in the Academic Festival Overture of Brahms (a potpourri of student songs) and Tchaikovsky's strongly nationalistic "Little Russian" Symphony No. 2 in C minor. The centerpiece of the program will be Beethoven's beautiful Triple Concerto in C major, which will feature soloists Cho-Liang Lin on the violin, Carter Brey on the cello, as well as Entremont on the piano. Asked his thoughts about the

Triple Concerto, Entremont said, good-naturedly, "I don't like to talk about music, I just like to do it!"

Entremont will celebrate his 60th birthday in June and said he looks forward to it and that he has "never felt better." He is being feted with big celebrations in Vienna and Tokyo. "Fifty is no fun, 60 is great!" he said. "I cried when I turned 30. Now I am looking forward to 90."

Commenting on the fact that many classical music performers, notably conductors, tend to live long, productive lives, Entremont joked, "That's why I'm conducting. So that I can live long! Conductors get very good lungs . . . and you generate earthquakes!"

(Philippe Entremont will conduct the Dresden Philharmonic at 8 p.m. Saturday at the Arlington Theater. For tickets and information call CAMA at 966-4324.)