

PERFORMING ARTS

Chamber Music Society

Instant applause greeted a beaming Fred Sherry, artistic director of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, after he announced that Wednesday night's Kennedy Center program would be purely Romantic, oozing with style. When Sherry was named to this position two years ago, some people worried his taste for contemporary music might squeeze 18th- and 19th-century composers out of the Society playbook. There was no Berio, Schoenberg, Schmittke or Martinu on the group's local season opener, but instead Brahms, Schumann, Schubert and Mendelssohn. Sherry picked and sequenced his choices intelligently, using just three full-time Society members and guest artists James Buswell and Dawn Upshaw.

Soprano Upshaw deviated from the script with some heartfelt remarks about Aaron Copland, whose recent death she acknowledged by performing his arrangement of the Shaker song "Simple Gifts." She and pianist Lee Luvisi then addressed seven selections from Schumann's "Myrthen" cycle, set to texts by Heine, Byron and Robert Burns among others. Upshaw's

clear diction and sense of dramatic purpose was best appreciated in the "Hebrew Melodies" section, while "Highlander's Farewell" showed, fleetingly, her impressive lower register. Luvisi, Upshaw and clarinetist David Shifrin joined forces for the seldom-heard "The Shepherd on the Rock," D. 965, supposedly the last piece Schubert wrote. Shifrin guided the mood from exhilaration to despair to joy, capping the action with a fanciful cadenza.

He and Luvisi invested Brahms's Clarinet Sonata in F Minor with an intimate glow reminiscent more of a drawing room than a large concert hall. Similarly, Luvisi, violinist Buswell and cellist Leslie Parnas tailored their commentaries in the Mendelssohn D Minor Piano Trio so one felt they were speaking as much to each other as to the audience. —Charles McCardell

The VA's Christmas Concert

Variety and enthusiasm marked Wednesday night's Christmas concert sponsored by the Veterans Administration Employees Association in Constitution Hall. The performance, a benefit for homeless veterans, included a cho-

rus and orchestra and familiar carols and other seasonal music, a solo violin performance by Gretchen Carlson, Miss America 1989, a short statement and Hanukah reading by Nobel laureate and Veterans Administration medical researcher Rosalyn Yalow, and appearances by gospel singer Wintley Phipps, Joyce Brothers and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Edward Derwinski.

Many of the performers in the orchestra and chorus are VA employees and volunteers from the Washington headquarters and VA hospitals and offices in 23 states. Conductor and music director Victor S. Wahby did an admirable job of putting the ensemble together and moving things smoothly along. The evening, which had a pleasant family feel, closed with sincere renditions of the "Hallelujah" Chorus and "America the Beautiful." Earlier, Brothers and VA official James Holsinger were on hand to read an unusual Christmas poem titled "The Night God Kissed the World," and among the many musicians, VA physician Cleve Francis and Blanche Hammond gave particularly ingratiating performances.

—Arthur Smith