

World premiere hits right keys

The Boston Symphony Orchestra, Robert Spano conducting, last night, at Symphony Hall. Program repeats this afternoon and tomorrow evening.

By KEITH POWERS

Music Review

Spook a thoroughbred, see how fast it runs. In Symphony Hall Thursday evening, composer Yehudi Wyner sent a jolt through the Boston Symphony Orchestra, aided by conductor Robert Spano, with his world premiere piano concerto, "Chiavi in Mano."

Wyner's commission formed part of an expansive program, one of the most rewarding of the season, which included Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll,"

the Mendelssohn first piano concerto, and Haydn 104, the "London." Robert Levin soloed in both piano works.

Wyner's "Chiavi in Mano" — it's a phrase stolen from Italian salesmen: basically, "if you got the keys, you own it."

The keys here are both under the soloist's fingers and in the musical suggestiveness, which hints at the work's eventual outcome, but subtly.

Like the Mendelssohn concerto, which began shockingly — for the era — in the soloist's hands, Wyner paints the first picture with the piano. He takes a figure from his earlier "Commedia," a chamber work for clarinet and piano, a motif that blends thirds and fourths in major and minor. It's an opening full of possibilities, and the piece makes the most of them, mainly thanks to the

dexterous soloist. Levin fills the bill as resident genius, sage and wonder-kind all at once.

"Chiavi" offers many chances for admiration. From its simple beginning, it expands to larger explorations, all following a thread that comments on previous material and moves quickly on. In one movement, but large, ambitious, almost overbearing in its humor, Wyner's "Chiavi" brings Ives — the great incorporator of popular idiom — to a new generation.

"Siegfried Idyll"? Shapely, thoughtful. The Haydn "London" symphony? So much more sophisticated than would be imagined. And while Mendelssohn's first concerto is an early work, written at 21, it sounds mature. Levin made it seem like child's play, but made sure it didn't sound like that.