



Orchestra reaches for exceptional with conductor Kazushi Ono, violinist Vadim Gluzman

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By MARK GREESHAM



Featured soloist Vadim Gluzman excelled in Bruch's concerto

Threats of marginally icy weather held off Thursday night as the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra performed music by Weber, Bruch and Mendelssohn, led by Japanese guest conductor Kazushi Ono with Ukrainian-born Israeli violinist Vadim Gluzman as the featured soloist. It was an evening of all-19th-century repertoire.

Ono, 52, principal conductor of Opéra national de Lyon, principal guest conductor of the decade-old Filarmonica Arturo Toscanini and conductor laureate with the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, has a much longer conducting history in Japan and Europe than in this country. This was his second appearance with the ASO; the first was in May 2011.

The concert opened with the Overture to Carl Maria von Weber's opera "Euryanthe," which the orchestra had not played for 30 years — since 1983. It was a brilliant curtain-raiser. The players offered up a bright, tight sense of ensemble under Ono's baton, giving a crisp punch to music that could easily have been played like a barn-burner. Instead, it sounded fresh in ways that made the ears sit up and take notice.

Next up was the Violin Concerto No. 1 by Max Bruch. Gluzman draws a large, aureate tone from his ex-Leopold Auer Stradivarius. His performance of the concerto was exceptional, with a musical honesty that eschewed vacuous flashiness. The orchestra played with fine sensitivity toward balance with Gluzman's solo violin but did not walk on eggshells. Ono did not hold it back, but Gluzman was well heard over it, never submerged.

Given the range of repertoire that Gluzman commands, one might be tempted to ask, why the oft-performed Bruch? On the one hand, it may have been simply what he was asked to play. It was last performed by the ASO five years ago by Sarah Chang, a short time away from the ASO stage compared with the exceptionally long wait for the return of Weber's Overture.

But the pragmatic answer is that Gluzman has recorded the Bruch for the BIS label. The CD was released in 2011, so it's a concerto that's currently on the front burner for him. He will perform it again with the Seattle Symphony in March, the Bournemouth Symphony in April and then again in July at the Festival International de Colmar with the Russian National Philharmonic Orchestra. Gluzman autographed CDs at intermission.

The performance of Felix Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3 was a little less meticulous than the first half of the concert in minor ways. The very first note experienced a tiny burp of not-quite-togetherness, and there were a couple of noticeable "clams" (musicians' slang for muffed notes) in the Scherzo second movement, the type of incidentals unlikely to be repeated in the next performance. But it was a fine concert overall, and the impact of the symphony's Finale matched that of the Weber Overture at the beginning.

Alas, this happens to be one of those weeks in which the ASO performs its subscription concert only twice rather than three times. The sole remaining performance will be Saturday night. The orchestra was scheduled to do a pair of sold-out educational "field trip" concerts for schoolchildren on Friday morning in Symphony Hall, but word is that they were canceled due to the forecasts of freezing rain. The weather is expected to clear up in plenty of time for Saturday's show.