



New Jersey Symphony Orchestra plays Tchaikovsky and Bernstein

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By **Ronni Reich/The Star-Ledger**

Following an opening night gala that ventured into jazz and new music, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra was back on traditional ground under music director Jacques Lacombe on Thursday, in an assured performance at the Bergen Performing Arts Center in Englewood.

The concert opened with Berlioz's bright, energetic overture to "Beatrice and Benedict," played with enthusiasm, occasionally to the point of a little shrillness.

Vadim Gluzman proved a well-chosen soloist for Bernstein's Serenade for Violin and Orchestra, with a warm, romantic sensibility that complemented the work's lyrical outpourings and offset its moments of angularity and discord.

Inspired by Plato's Symposium, with sections devoted to perspectives of Aristophanes, Socrates and others, the work begins with a solo ode to love, which Gluzman played with smoothness, presence and precision. The orchestra came in soundly but deferentially as alternating jovial and emphatic passages illustrated duality, with Gluzman fearlessly digging into double-stopped lines.

He handled the work's turns of character with vivid interpretations, growing soulful then fiery, then skittering impishly, with explosive contribution from the NJSO in the percussive scherzo. The violinist and the orchestra joined forces particularly affectingly in the fervent fourth movement paean to love's various aspects, with rich layers of string sound.

For all the care employed in the lead-up to the finale, it was especially rewarding to hear a loose, fully committed performance of the rustic, playful, jazz-tinged music of the party band that interrupts the philosopher characters on which most of the work focuses. A duet with principal cellist Jonathan Spitz also stood out for its elegance. Throughout, Lacombe led a well-coordinated and dynamic performance.

Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 starts with a brass motive signifying "fate" that hangs over the full work even as it journeys from darkness to light. The NJSO gave its immense first movement careful shadings. The work is closely associated with the composer's coming to grips with his unhappy marriage and homosexuality, and the orchestra brought out its anguish, building to feverish heights and dark, quaking depths illustrating seemingly insurmountable destiny, and provoking a gasp or two from the sparse audience.

Luxurious sound distinguished the andantino and forceful trumpets heightened the blazing finale.