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New Jersey Symphony, With Gluzman, Brings Bernstein and Tchaikovsky to Princeton

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (NJSO) subtitled its concert series this past weekend "Lacombe & Gluzman." This moniker referred to the conductor of the concert and the soloist in its featured work, but the descriptive title was so much more. NJSO Music Director Jacques Lacombe and Israeli violinist Vadim Gluzman have had a long performance history together, and this combination of conductor and soloist took a rarely-heard musical gem to new heights. Although this concert series was not presented in the NJSO's home base of Newark's NJPAC, audiences in the other four venues (including Richardson Auditorium Friday night) were treated to an extraordinary three-way partnership among conductor, violinist, and orchestral ensemble.

The piece which Mr. Gluzman brought to life was Leonard Bernstein's programmatic *Serenade for Violin and Orchestra*. Composed between 1953 and 1954, this five-movement work inspired by Plato's philosophical text *Symposium* reminded the audience at Richardson of Bernstein's legacy as one of the great melodists in music history. Bernstein orchestrated this piece uniquely for strings, harp, a wide range of percussion, and a solo violin, whose line was at times contrary to the ensemble and other times a precise and integrated part of the orchestral fabric.

Mr. Gluzman began the opening movement solo line with both confidence and inquisitiveness into the melodic depth of the *Serenade* and its emotional impact. Melodies were expressively passed back and forth across the stage as the NJSO demonstrated rich sectional playing from violas and celli. Mr. Gluzman's energy was limitless, matching the jazz elements in the music and showing that this soloist lives the music he performs. In several of the movements, the solo line never stopped (often with virtuosic demands) and Mr. Gluzman seemed to make a particular effort to play in solidarity with the first violin section, executing perfect timing with pizzicato strings and punctuating harp. Intensity throughout the work was built by the extended percussion section, complementing well Bernstein's poignant musical dialog among soloist, strings, and percussion.

Mr. Lacombe preceded this work with the light and airy Hector Berlioz *Overture to Beatrice and Benedict*, and followed it with the substantial Symphony No. 4 in F minor by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky. The Berlioz work sustained a bit of French quirkiness, with very crisp and clean orchestral playing from the ensemble as a whole. Instrumental solos, especially from flutist Bart Feller and oboist Melanie Feld provided elegance against rich string playing and clear-cut trios of trumpets and trombones. Mr. Lacombe effectively ended sections gracefully and whipped the orchestra into a grand finish to the *Overture*.

Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 was a myriad of musical personalities as the composer was consumed with fatalism, yet conveyed final hope at the conclusion of the four abundant movements. The opening Fate motive was clearly presented by the brass in a crisp Classical style, as Mr. Lacombe kept the mood driven and forceful. The concurrent melodic line from bassoonist Robert Wagner and clarinetist Karl Herman sounded as one instrument, with very light strings toward the end of the first movement. Throughout the symphony, the players maintained control over accelerandos at the ends of movements, while at the same time allowing instrumental solos to be heard.

Oboist Ms. Feld demonstrated a pastoral and continuous line in the poignant second movement, echoed by the cello section and answered at times by flutist Mr. Feller. Like Bernstein, Tchaikovsky was a great melodist, most evident in the second movement *Andantino*, and these tunes were made all the more touching by the juxtaposition of a languorous melody against incisive wind flourishes and instrumental echoes.

The third movement was uniquely scored for extended pizzicato strings, an unusual effect which is not easy to pull off as a large orchestra. The collective result of ensemble pizzicato against the intervening wind passages, combined with the dynamic ranges found by the players in the closing movements, accentuated the pathos and tenderness of the symphony, and brought the concert to an eloquent close.

Written by: Nancy Plum

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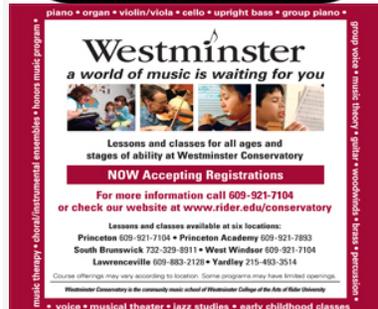
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