

ZUILL BAILEY

CELLIST

A Bang: Symphony keeps up reputation

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By Ken Keuffel

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Robert Moody entered his third season as music director of the Winston-Salem Symphony yesterday with a question, namely "what do (we) do now" to maintain the positive buzz among the orchestra's supporters?

The answer, as yesterday's program at the Stevens Center revealed again and again, was to treat them to a bang.

The musicians did a bang-up job. They introduced the premiere of *PHOENIX for orchestra*, by Dan Locklair, the composer-in-residence at Wake Forest University. This piece began life as a fanfare and has blossomed into something quite triumphal in effect and character, something that can celebrate everything from the inauguration of college presidents to the beginnings of orchestra seasons.

PHOENIX benefits from antiphonal effects: brass players on the balcony traded notes with those on stage, creating a surround-sound-like ambiance. There are orchestrations punctuated by percussion and enriched by an electric organ that sounds like a pipe organ. A stately processional section rivals the pomp of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance*. One listener heard a bit of Hollywood in it, too, reminding her of a heady moment in a Steven Spielberg film. I can't say that I disagree entirely.

While there were a few bangs in Elgar's Cello Concerto, which concluded the concert's first half, these were hardly the piece's sole attractions. Zuill Bailey's engaging work as soloist drove that point home again and again, as did the composer, an Englishman who came up with a work that rivals similar efforts by Dvorak and Schumann. You hear that in the expert way the orchestration exploits and complements the soloist. A lesser composition might have overwhelmed him.

Bailey, playing on a rare Matteo Goffriller from 1693, brought out playfulness in more fiery sections that made the audience laugh and the soloist wink back in approval. How nice to be reminded of how much fun making music can be. Bailey revealed a soulfulness that was perfect for the opening movement's long-lined melody, and he transformed momentary plucked and bowed fragments into a more complex whole of parts that cohered. The final movement sizzled. Moody coordinated the proceedings well.

The 1812 Overture, which concluded the program, is Russian Peter Tchaikovsky's inspired response to his country's defeat of the invading French. But we Americans love to hear it outdoors at fireworks- and cannon-filled celebrations of Independence Day. Moody asked us to reconsider it in the concert hall, hoping that we'd find more substance than noise when we did.

I'd say that we got substance *and* noise. The latter came in deafening, precisely rendered sounds of 19th-century canons recorded at West Point. As for the substance, it showed up details that distance might have obscured, in everything from the cellos' expressive playing of the piece's opening measures to John Ellis' felicitous oboe.

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111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019

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