

ZUILL BAILEY

CELLO

LAS VEGAS SUN

REVIEW:

Tchaikovsky concert's drama isn't all in the music

Conductor's words precede thrilling cello performance

By Joe Brown

Mon, Feb 16, 2009

If he wasn't already a cellist, Zuill Bailey would be a rock star. Or at the very least the hero on the covers of romance paperbacks.

With his strong-jawed matinee idol looks, Bailey embraces his curvy instrument, passionately tossing his dark mane, arching his eyebrow and making the sort of impassioned faces more often seen on heavy metal guitarists.

Bailey is exactly the sort of magnetic soloist you'd desire for a classical concert on Valentine's Day. And if the Las Vegas Philharmonic's all-Tchaikovsky program was a chocolate sampler, Bailey was its creamy center.

The cellist performed the Russian composer's Variations on a Rococo Theme (Op. 33), and Nocturne for Violoncello and Orchestra (Op. 19, No. 4), both of which he recently recorded with the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra. **In his hands, the two relatively brief pieces offered a thrilling showcase for the instrument's sonic possibilities.** The Philharmonic's woodwinds and strings offered perfectly delicate counterpoint and support to his warm, singing lines, delicate, hummingbird-quick runs and sobbing, resonant tremolo.

Bailey is an incontrovertibly showy player — he did everything short of playing his cello with his teeth and setting it on fire. **His dynamic presence provided what the increasingly fluent Las Vegas Philharmonic needs more of — a sense of event and showmanship without sacrificing a jot of musicianship.**

The Philharmonic began the evening with the a less-than-cathartic performance of the familiar "Pathétique" symphony (Symphony No. 6 in B minor), which never quite caught fire, and sounded somewhat mechanical and unbalanced.

The orchestra rebounded at the program's conclusion with Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy, which throbbed with tragic passion and tension, swelling and spilling over into the overwhelmingly yearning lovers' theme.

The music was preceded with a note of drama. Speaking from the side of the stage, music director David Itkin, addressed the "unfortunate dramas that have played out in the Philharmonic ... which found its way into the newspaper," and confirmed that "the disarray in administration is finally over with."

Itkin added that the orchestra is now being competently led by board members and "remaining spectacular staff," and reconfirmed his own tenure. "I know some of you here worried that I would throw up my hands and say 'this is just too much trouble.' That is not going to happen," he assured the capacity crowd, to relieved applause.

"The bad news," Itkin continued, "is that the disarray has left us with a legacy of \$200,000 in debt." The good news, he went on to say, is that an anonymous donor offered a matching grant of up to \$100,000, which Itkin challenged the audience to meet. "If everyone in this hall would give \$100, this conversation would be over."

Saturday's Tchaikovsky-fest ended on a sweet note, as Philharmonic volunteers handed out Valentine tokens at the door: men received chocolates and women took home a rose.

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