

ZUILL BAILEY

CELLO

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In performance: National Philharmonic

Web-only review: National Philharmonic goes one-two-three

by Mark J. Estren, Nov. 1, 2009

It was one-two-three-go for the National Philharmonic Orchestra at Strathmore on Halloween night. And "go" the evening's soloists certainly did: first one, then two, then all three, in an unusual and exhilarating program of a concerto, a double concerto and a triple concerto.

Pianist Brian Ganz opened with Bach's F Minor Harpsichord Concerto, BWV 1056, giving it a warm sound and capital-R Romantic interpretation on a full-size concert grand. This piece is something of a specialty for Ganz, who played it with the Virginia Chamber Orchestra in September on a baby grand. The work does not fit modern pianos very well, especially in the second movement, in which Bach contrasts plucked strings with the plucking of harpsichord notes. But as a modern interpretation, Ganz's flowed prettily, and Piotr Gajewski conducted the orchestra with grace and delicacy.

The sometimes murky sound of Brahms's Double Concerto became wonderfully clear with chamber-orchestra accompaniment, despite some overzealous horn playing. **Violinist Elena Urioste and cellist Zuill Bailey went for drama and fervor in the first movement, lovely expansiveness in the second and rhythmic strength in the third. Bailey took the lead throughout, the deep, rich sound of his 1693 Matteo Goffriller cello permeating the orchestra with burnished tone.** Urioste could have used a little more oomph. Whether from timidity or because of the inherent characteristics of her 1750 Michelangelo Bergonzi instrument, her sound tended to be subsumed beneath both Bailey's and that of the orchestra - which Gajewski again conducted with verve and spirit.

The extent to which Urioste was overmatched was even clearer in Beethoven's Triple Concerto, in which the ebullience of Bailey and Ganz was evident throughout. Their instruments mingled in easy rapport, while the violin seemed more reticent - although Urioste's tone was lovely when it did come through. Gajewski here offered a light and lilting accompaniment that kept the soloists in the musical forefront and made this too-infrequently-heard piece something of a sonic spectacular. There were no Halloween tricks at this concert, but the treats were plentiful.

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