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Art News and Reviews
From Around the World

**HIGH ENERGY MARKS THE BEGINNING OF THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY'S
"SUMMER IN THE CITY SERIES"**

**AMERICAN CELLIST ZUILL BAILEY SHOWS GREAT PROMISE
IN TCHAIKOVSKY'S ROCCO VARIATIONS**

By John P. Chase
West Coast U.S. Reporter

The San Francisco Symphony, after returning from a very well-received European tour and series of imaginative concerts in June exploring music of Wagner and the music of pre-Nazi Germany's Weimer Republic, including a superb semi-staged version Wagner's Flying Dutchman, turned inward for its summer "pop" series. Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas gave the conducting reins over to its youthful and talented Associate Conductor, Edwin Outwater for the series' "classical" concerts. The exceptions on the podium will be its Grammy-winning chorus master Vance George in a performance of Carl Orff's popular Carmina Burana on July 17 and 18 and a couple of out-of-town Broadway style conductors, John McDaniels and Rob Fisher, to handle the conducting chores for Carol Burnett and mezzo-soprano Frederica Von Stade on July 11th and 13th and Patty Lapone on July 19.

Turning inward for such festivals is not surprising given the financial state of musical arts organizations across the country. In San Francisco, its symphony is one of the few healthy orchestras in the country even making a small profit last year. Financial prudence in these times is probably wise. On the other hand, the San Francisco Opera is facing a nearly eight million dollar deficit.

Financial prudence, however, does not mean that it is going to be anything but first rate. This all Tchaikovsky program, standard for a pops series, was marked with youthful energy and first rate conducting and playing. The program included Tchaikovsky's Second Symphony, the "Little Russian," Variations on a Rocco Theme for Cello and Orchestra with Zuill Bailey in debut with San Francisco and the ever-programmed 1812 Overture.

The first three Symphonies of Tchaikovsky, all subtitled, "Winter Dreams," "Little Russian," and "The Polish," were ignored by conductors for much of the early 20th century as lacking depth. It was not until the 1960's during his tenure with the London Symphony that the late conductor Antal Dorati decided to single-handedly restore them to the standard orchestral repertory as worthy examples of Tchaikovsky's early works. They were all written before he was 36 and revised in his later years. The Second Symphony displays all of the composer's youthful energy so it was appropriate for this concert. These early years of his life were perhaps the only time the composer was ever truly happy and the Second Symphony reflects that. The third, the "Polish" was written just three years before his first mature symphony, Symphony 4 in F minor, and displays his maturing composing styles.

San Francisco's Edwin Outwater gave the Second Symphony a vigorous and fluid performance completing the composer's breathless last movement with great verve. Outwater's own inexperience as a major symphony conductor showed a here and there with sometimes slightly rocky starts to movements. The orchestra, with most of its regular first or associate chairs in place, gave their young conductor some superb solo and ensemble playing.

Some minor youthful musical indiscretions marked the debut performance of American cellist Zuill Bailey. Unlike the Symphony, the Rocco Variations come from composer's mature years and were written for a young cellist and friend in 1876. Bailey, one of rising cello stars in this country, can often be found playing in the Perlman, Schmidt, Bailey Trio. He tours extensively and has appeared in the Chicago Symphony's Ravinia Festival. He also has appeared in the HBO series OZ, portraying, what else, a cellist.

Having listen to his first solo CD, a varied selection of music ranging from 18th century French composer Francois Francoeur's Cello Sonata in E, to one of Bach's Suites for Unaccompanied Cello to Henri Vieuxtemps jolly little variations on Yankee Doodle, (Delos 3326), he gave an expected lyric approach the Rocco Variations. After a little rough rhythmic start between Outwater and Bailey, the piece settled down to a bouncy sweet toned lyricism. It could be argued that this piece requires such an approach given its title, but I would have opted for little more Russian soul to come through. After all the "Rocco" theme, upon which the variations are based, is by Tchaikovsky. As with Outwater, Bailey shows great promise and it can be assumed they will both further re-examine their interpretations of works they performs.

The concerts ended with a bargain-basement, but enthusiastic, 1812 Overture, using digitally recorded cannons and bells. From my observation point in Davies Symphony Hall's first tier, the audio man was obviously an experienced 1812 player and did not require a score. The cannons and bells coming in right on time from the audio board installed for the occasion. The San Francisco Symphony and San Francisco Art Commission's "Summer in the City Series" runs at various Bay Area venues through July 26, 2003.

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