
Philharmonia Orchestra

Carnegie Hall

During Christoph von Dohnanyi's illustrious 18-year tenure as music director of the Cleveland Orchestra, which ended last season, it was easy for this towering musician's American admirers to forget that he had a busy career in Europe as well. Since 1997 Mr. Dohnanyi has been the principal conductor of the eminent Philharmonia Orchestra, the resident orchestra at London's Royal Festival Hall.

That he and the Philharmonia are working together effectively was clear from their concert at Carnegie Hall on Wednesday night, the first of two programs. The orchestra appears tonight at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, a program offering Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll," Brahms's First Symphony and Sibelius's Violin Concerto.

The Sibelius concerto was also the opening work at Carnegie Hall on Wednesday, with the Georgian-born violinist Lisa Batiashvili as soloist. This alluring yet enigmatic concerto is hard to pull off in performance. For all its rhapsodic flair and intensity, a Nordic somberness pervades the music. Even the polonaise-like finale should have a heavy-footed quality.

Ms. Batiashvili, still in her early 20's, brought passion, virtuosity and intelligence to her performance. Still, her playing had too much steely brilliance to convey the music's melancholic mood. She stood out from the orchestra, which fully captured the concerto's mellow colorings and weighty textures.

After intermission, Mr. Dohnanyi conducted Bruckner's Symphony No. 4 in E-flat, the "Romantic." It's easy for this elusive, 70-minute work to seem much longer, since none of the four movements are in any hurry to get anywhere, not the ruminative outer movements, certainly not the funereal Andante, not even the intriguingly subdued Scherzo.

From the opening moments, with the rustling string tremolos almost inaudibly soft and the horn's laconic statement of the elemental main theme, this performance exuded a calmly hypnotic steadiness. Absolute precision was not the goal here. Instead Mr. Dohnanyi elicited a sense of organic cohesiveness from the orchestra. He made every event — like the passage in the second movement when a chorale for strings modulates to an unexpected key with each short phrase — seem a curious yet inevitable turn.

Now that Mr. Dohnanyi has more time to devote to the Philharmonia, this partnership should only get better. **ANTHONY TOMMASINI**

CHRISTOPH VON DOHNANYI

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2003

MUSIC IN REVIEW

COLBERT ARTISTS MANAGEMENT INC.
111 West 57th Street, NY, NY 10019
212.757.0782 • fax 212.541.5179
nycolbert@colbertartists.com
www.colbertartists.com