

Symphony's electrical lesson

Review By Robert Coleman

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Stefan Sanderling started life in communist East Germany. As a child he knew artistic repression and restricted personal liberty. During a pre-performance talk, he told of visits to his home by a paranoid and chain-smoking Dmitri Shostakovich. Sanderling developed an affinity with the Russian composer and brought it to the stage of Abravanel Hall on Friday night for an electrifying performance of Symphony No. 5 in D minor with the Utah Symphony Orchestra.

Stating "I need this symphony for my life," Sanderling related in animated tones what the composition meant to him. Written to appease an angry Stalin, the work ironically satisfied Soviet leadership but allowed the composer artistic expression, clearly critical of the regime. The liberating music allowed eloquence that he was not able to relate verbally.

Sanderling's interpretation emphasized raw emotion -- driven by adrenaline. The symphony seemed biographical of conductor and composer.

A reflective solo by concertmaster Ralph Matson appeared to characterize a protagonist, frustrated by his lot in life. As the symphony ended, mood and tonality changed turning victim into victor. Principals, Erich Graf (flute) and Bruce Gifford (horn) traded notes during an exquisite first movement duet. Gifford's high leaps hit the mark.

Tad Calcara (clarinet) soloed with delicacy and expressiveness throughout the work. A mocking second movement E flat clarinet solo by Russell Harlow laughed with sardonic wit. **Earlier in the program Marc-André Hamelin performed Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 9 in E-flat major, "Jeunehomme."**

The Canadian pianist's prodigious technique allowed freedom to explore interpretative intricacies. Hamelin eschewed flamboyancy and embraced the work's intimacy.

The unusual second movement was infused with sadness and vulnerability.

Making a contemporary statement, Hamelin's strongly dissonant cadenza sounded more like Shostakovich than Mozart, creating a riveting though strange effect. If the audience wasn't convinced of the soloist's artistry during the concerto, an encore of Debussy's "Reflections in the Water" left no doubt. Hamelin performed the Impressionistic work with delicacy producing shimmering musical illusion.

The concert opened with Modest Mussorgsky's "Prelude to Khovanshchina," orchestrated by Shostakovich.

Sanderling's unhurried pacing of the sublime work portrayed sunrise over Red Square -- symbolic of a dawning new age.

Colbert Artists Management Inc.

111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019
Tel: 212.757.0782 • Fax: 212.541.5179
E: nycolbert@colbertartists.com
Web: <http://www.colbertartists.com>