

*in Paris*. I've heard more polished readings of the Barber; balances were a bit off and textures a little untidy. The protagonist of the Gershwin tone poem came across more as a stereotypically vulgar American tourist than a breezy boulevardier. Still, those great Gershwin tunes worked their customary magic, and the musicians clearly were enjoying themselves, not least Principal Chris Martin in the bluesy trumpet solo.

JOHN VON RHEIN

### Seattle Symphony

## Stephane Deneve, conductor; Paul Lewis, pianist

As American orchestra managements know, a US premiere on the program is not necessarily audience catnip. In the April 17-20 Seattle Symphony subscription program, however, the first American hearing of Scottish composer James MacMillan's *Death of Oscar* proved that this attractive piece is anything but formidable. Based on a battle episode in ancient Celtic history, the 10-minute curtain raiser is both pictorial and rousing, with some creative scoring (particularly in the brass) and an eloquent English horn solo (played with exceptional flair by Stefan Farkas).

Deneve, a French-born guest conductor popular with the Seattle musicians and audience, gave his listeners some engaging oral program notes before the MacMillan piece, declaring himself "an adoptive Scot" (he's the former music director of the Royal Scottish National Symphony and lived in that country for eight years). The new work, a co-commission of the RSNS, Stuttgart Radio Symphony, and Seattle Symphony, deserves a wide audience and earned an unusually warm welcome from the audience.

Pianist Paul Lewis has made his reputation as a Beethoven specialist; that was certainly reinforced by his performance of Piano Concerto No. 3. The dark beauty of this score was carefully delineated in his immaculate reading. Assertive and delicate by turns, he went from a powerhouse first-movement cadenza to a spellbinding pianissimo for the opening of the Largo. His trills and ornaments had exceptional clarity. Deneve gave Lewis excellent partnership, displaying attentive accuracy in his stick technique with precisely timed entrances, and never overpowering his soloist in even the most dulcet passages.

For these performances Deneve reconfigured the orchestra to the format preferred by

former Music Director Gerard Schwarz: split violins, with the firsts on his left and the seconds on his right. (Current Music Director Ludovic Morlot prefers the more usual layout with the seconds alongside the firsts.) Deneve's arrangement favored the antiphonal passages in the MacMillan piece as well as in the concerto.

The division was neither an advantage nor disadvantage in the final work, Rachmaninoff's gloriously tuneful but endlessly repetitive Symphony No. 2. The conductor made the most of the arch-romantic score, whipping the orchestra into a well-ordered frenzy with his incisive baton, his urgent swooping gestures, and even his hair (a riotous mop of curls that took on a life of its own). The third movement, with its delicious but overworked arching theme, was a particular success, and the orchestra—unusually attentive—was quick to respond to every variation in tempo.

MELINDA BARGREEN

### New York

## Tokyo Philharmonic

The Tokyo Philharmonic launched a six-city centennial tour with its US debut in Alice Tully Hall on March 11. The well-received event heralded the long overdue arrival of a major orchestra.

What took them so long? The three-year postponement of the 2011 centennial tour was easy to explain: the devastating Fukushima earthquake struck exactly three years to the day before the New York concert. But the timeline printed in the glossy gala program also suggested the difficulties of funding and sustaining, let alone marketing internationally, a performing organization devoted to mostly foreign repertoire over the course of a turbulent century.

Founded by a Nagoya kimono shop as "The Boys' classical Music Ensemble" and led by a retired military band leader, the group, renamed the Nagoya Symphony, relocated to Tokyo in 1938. War and the country's later financial instability formed the social background to the band's growing pains. It wasn't until 1984 that a 50-day European tour raised their international profile considerably.

Dan Ettinger, the orchestra's chief conductor since 2010, had a full schedule in Mannheim, where he is music director of the National Theater, so American-trained Eiji Oue led the nine-day tour of three programs performed in six cities. A Japanese native with extensive experience in the US and Europe—notably music directorships in Minnesota,

Barcelona, and Hanover (where he continues to teach conducting)—and a dapper, flamboyant presence, he proved a good figurehead for the tour.

Toshiro Mayuzumi's *Bugaku*, a ballet in two parts commissioned by George Balanchine in 1962 for New York City Ballet, invokes the dance portion of a Gagaku (a form of imperial Japanese classical music). The piece begins with softly slithering strings that build into a stately processional, embellished with brass and percussion excursions, and dies away in a halo of strings. The second movement, framed with a jaunty solo piccolo theme, is more rambling and ominous, with aggressive thrusting motifs reminiscent of *The Rite of Spring*. A grandiose coda drawn from the opening theme completes the 20-minute piece, which showed off the orchestra's robust and unified sound as well as the confident virtuosity of solo players. Oue shaped the music with flamboyant gestures that translated into clean, powerful playing.

One big problem: Tully was too small and resonant a hall for this large-scale music. This held true all evening and must have been excruciating for listeners close to the stage.

Kiyoshige Koyama's *Woodcutter's Song* (1967) presented four folk song settings that recalled the updated tonality of Ravel and Copland. Percussion and piccolo imitated folk instruments with leisurely paced improvisatory passages with plenty of pitch bending, alternating with full ensemble refrains. The colorful orchestration and toe-tapping syncopations made this an accessible crowd-pleaser.

*The Rite of Spring* displayed Oue's conducting style at its most physical: he almost danced with the concertmaster, stabbed the air with his baton, and in general embodied the ritualistic dances. While Stravinsky's chugging unisons tended to sound dutiful rather than driven, this was overall a muscular and majestic *Rite*, one that certainly ranked among the best. While I prefer a more raw sound for this pagan musical monument, the Tokyo Philharmonic mustered power, precision, and urgency that shook the small hall.

For the encores Oue cut loose with some platform hijinks. At the end of a lushly orchestrated Irving Berlin medley, he draped an American flag over the podium and motioned for the audience to stand and sing along with 'God Bless America'. Then he reversed the flag and configured it into a jacket festooned with a rising sun, which he donned to conduct the rousing 'Yagibushi' from Yuzo Toyama's Rhapsody for Orchestra. The audience leaped to their feet, clapping in time, and burst into enthusiastic applause at the final notes, end-

ing the concert on an exuberant note. It was a New York debut to celebrate.

SUSAN BRODIE

New York

## Christian Tetzlaff, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

Christian Tetzlaff joined the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra in Carnegie Hall on March 29 for a satisfying program of music by Hungarian composers.

Orpheus has performed without a conductor since its founding in 1973 during the heyday of communes, co-ops, and collectives. Its collaborative method (the "Orpheus Process") of creating a musical interpretation has been the object of leadership studies and is taught as an alternative to top-down management in school and business settings. Orpheus holds a unique place in New York's musical life with its chamber-music approach to orchestral repertoire.

Kodaly's *Hungarian Rondo* is a sweetly orchestrated medley of Hungarian folk tunes in rondo form, with a cheerful military march framing the sections. The main theme, harmonized gently in the strings, anchors more rustic interludes, which cycle back into variations on the original theme. While some of the interludes as well as the robust finale surge into a frenzied gypsy "nota" style, the recurring theme gives the effect of a lost world savored in memory. The Orpheus string players gave the refrain an exquisite luminous sheen, though a little more raucous energy would have been welcome in the faster sections based on dance tunes.

Bartok's *Divertimento* for String Orchestra (1939) was written during the composer's final European tour, as he was preparing to leave Hungary because of its worsening political situation. Though Bartok had collected Hungarian folk music, his orchestral works were less literally based on folk material than Kodaly's. It's easy to hear a modern anxiety in this *divertimento*, which opens with a driving rhythmic pulse and assertively accented modal theme that suggest folk song without quoting it directly. The two energetic outer movements balance the moody inner movement, which seems to suggest the inchoate dread of the historic moment. While I missed hearing the full orchestra specified by Bartok, Orpheus's chamber music approach, with its intimate interactions, revealed the music's inner complexity.

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