

Albany Symphony Orchestra's "Tchaikovsky Spectacular" @ Palace Theatre, 4/23/10

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By JOSEPH DALTON
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ALBANY – Spectacular. Advertising copywriters often use that adjective to describe concerts of Tchaikovsky, especially when his 1812 Overture is performed, with or without real cannons.

The Albany Symphony Orchestra's "Tchaikovsky Spectacular" Friday night at the Palace Theatre didn't emphasize booming spectacle. Instead, it earned the critique of spectacular for the outstanding level of musical execution and deep emotional impact.

The Symphony No. 6 "Pathetique" was a tour de force for massed forces that burst to life in the glittering waltz and climaxed in the striding march. As always, that third movement was so convincing as a grand finale that much of the audience broke into applause. But the heart of the piece was still to come in the wrenching final Adagio. At its conclusion, when conductor David Alan Miller left the podium, he looked flushed and somber. He was also drenched, though it was hard to tell if it was just from sweat, or maybe a few tears were mixed in to the flow.

For the first time in memory, Miller walked amongst the orchestra, thanking and congratulating his players while the audience cheered.

Through the symphony's many mood swings, there was a consistent and admirable attention to subtle levels of dynamics and clarity of textures. To get there must have taken study and discipline in rehearsal, but everything came off fluid and organic.

Equally satisfying yet a world away in sentiment was the light and frothy Rococo Variations, featuring the 26 year-old cellist Joshua Roman. Though a flirtatious presence, with a sly grin and darting, mischievous eyes, he was no mere showboat. Roman's playing was lean and exacting, yet delivered with an off the cuff ease. His combination of charming personality and utter musicality should take him far.

The concert opened with a handsome performance of the March Slave followed by the final movement of the Orchestral Suite No. 3. The latter, structured as a series of variations, is a kind of catalog of Tchaikovsky's trademark gestures and brilliant orchestration techniques. A highlight of the performance was a solo by concertmaster Jill Levy that began with startling muscle and verve before easing into a lyric serenade.

Joseph Dalton is a local freelance writer who contributes regularly to the Times Union.

MUSIC REVIEW

Albany Symphony Orchestra's
Tchaikovsky Spectacular
When: 7:30 p.m. Friday
Where: Palace Theatre, Albany
Duration: Two hours, 30 minutes with one intermission.