

## The Register-Guard: *Arts: Arts*

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Concert Review HHHH

### **'Mozart's Influence' struggles to hit right note**

By Tom Manoff

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Russian pianist Yuri Rozum was the featured soloist in the Oregon Mozart Player's season closer Saturday night at the Hult Center's Soreng Theater. Ludwig van Beethoven's "Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major" was played for an attentive and appreciative audience, many, it seemed, who came especially to hear him. The performance of the concerto was the highpoint of the evening.

Rozum's approach to the concerto was quite intimate, seeking a focused and smooth sound from the piano to further that goal. Generally he favored that intimacy over fireworks, a smart choice for this concerto, a work that many pianists overplay.

Rozum phrases with careful purpose, sometimes stretching a phrase midpoint by briefly dwelling on a few special notes. The result is a kind of swelling sensation, and when it worked, it had a lovely effect. When it didn't work (at least for me) it seemed a distraction from the compact nature of Beethoven's motivic structure, and didn't allow the inner tension of the form enough forward motion.

The orchestra played wonderfully, conductor Glen Cortese and his group supporting Rozum's interpretation by matching him in both spirit and musical detail.

Programming concerts under some unifying idea seems to have become an important part of marketing these days. The notion is to attract listeners through some kind of emotional or intellectual idea. As an old-fashioned sort of fellow, I don't always care for it. Program titles often seem the same — the "passion of this," the "spirit of that," or the "meaning of whatever." A better program for me might be called "a group of pieces that the conductor really likes."

However, when it works and brings people to the hall, I accept its usefulness. There are organizations that employ unifying ideas quite effectively. But when it doesn't work, it can misshape a program unintentionally and cause all kinds of problems. This was such a night.

"Mozart's Influence" was the idea of the evening. The opener was Sergei Prokofiev's "Classical Symphony" — a work famously inspired by Haydn (in the composer's own words). Cortese says he hears several traits that strike him as more Mozartean. There's an argument there, I suppose. But purposefully seeking out some Mozartean traits that may or may not be present causes the piece to sound Viennese. That missed the symphony's essential character, which is distinctly Russian.

In a long night of too many works, the Prokofiev symphony seemed under-rehearsed. The wind playing at times was on the mark. But the string sound was messy, most noticeably in the timid rendering of the famous jaunty theme of the first movement.

Soprano Dawn Wolski performed the next two works — the Second Movement of Mozart's famous "Exsultate, Jubilate K. 165" and Franz Schubert's lesser known "Salve Regina Op. 47 in F Major." Whatever the connection, the impression was that of two slow pieces, which made the program lag. Worse, it put an unfair burden on the soprano. Wolski seems a good young singer, but this was hardly the way to show off her gift. A wiser choice would have allowed her to start with something a bit flashy to loosen up her voice and go on from there. But that would not have followed the evening's instructive purpose.

The Beethoven Concerto followed. And then intermission.

Mozart's "Mass in C Major K. 167" comprised the second half of the program with the Oregon State University Chamber Choir. The group was well prepared and sang with spirit, though the performance lacked nuance, certainly a result of too little rehearsal time.

A more successful program would have cut the two vocal pieces, allowed more time to rehearse Prokofiev's masterpiece, and set up the Beethoven Concerto more properly. It might not have had a catchy idea, but I don't think the audience came for an idea, they came for the music.

Rozum will play a solo recital at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at Beall Hall.

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Tom Manoff is the classical music critic for NPR's "All Things Considered."

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