

EVENING OUT

Soloist eager to tackle challenging piece

Tchaikovsky's concerto no cakewalk, even on Gluzman's Stradivarius

By Jane Lott

IJ correspondent

IT'S LIKE A CELTIC KNOT, so interwoven is the program of the next Marin Symphony performance on Jan. 20 and 22. Or perhaps like a spider web, each thread linking with every other. There are the two pieces by Igor Stravinsky, the famous Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, the guest soloist and his Stradivarius, and of course Marin Symphony music director Alasdair Neale.

To unravel it, start with the guest soloist, Vadim Gluzman. Born in the Ukraine into a family of professional musicians, raised in Israel and subsequently educated at renowned Juilliard School, Gluzman first met Neale when the two were guest artists with another orchestra.

"He's a fantastic conductor," Gluzman says.

So when Neale invited him to share the stage in Marin, Gluzman readily agreed. They decided to play Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto.

Though this is one of the most difficult pieces of the

violin repertoire, Gluzman is up to the challenge. He has been lauded by the Washington Post for his "commanding technique" and the "visionary breadth" of his interpretation. Part of the credit for his critical acclaim goes to his violin, he says — a glorious Stradivarius, built in 1690 and loaned to him by its owner through the Stradivari Society.

Gluzman explains that the violin's sensitivity allows him to create the kind of music other instruments would be incapable of producing. "It's a really sensational instrument," he says. "... I always dreamed of playing like this."

Gluzman's violin looks as beautiful as it sounds. Made of native Italian maple treated with local minerals and painted with copper-colored varnish, it represents Antonio Stradivarius's early work. As with most Stradivari instruments that have survived through the centuries, the violin has been given a name. It's known as the "Auer" after Russian pedagogue Leopold Auer, the most influential teacher of the "Golden Age," who owned the violin for 20 years at the end of the 19th



Provided by Marin Symphony

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century.

The ironic connection here is that Auer was also the man to whom Tchaikovsky dedicated his violin concerto, hoping the great violinist would perform its premiere. The composer was devastated when Auer called the piece unplayable.

"It's not easy," Gluzman admits, "but I would not call it unplayable."

Although it does take a lot of physical strength to play, he

IF YOU GO

Who: Violinist Vadim Gluzman with the Marin Symphony, conducted by Alasdair Neale

What: "Program of Russian Greats," featuring Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto and works by Stravinsky

When: 7:30 p.m. Jan. 20 and 22; pre-concert conversation with Neale begins at 6:30 p.m.

Where: Marin Veterans Memorial Auditorium, 10 Avenue of the Flags, Civic Center, San Rafael

Tickets: \$27 to \$65

Information: 499-6800, 479-8100, www.marinsymphony.org, www.ticketmaster.com

Also: Read more about Stradivari violins at www.stereophile.com/news/10378/index.html. Hear a preview of Gluzman's playing at www.myspace.com/vadimgluzman

adds that "there are very few concertos I enjoy as much."

But even Tchaikovsky's benefactress had reservations about the first movement, which one critic called "music that stinks in the ear." The composer responded to his patroness, "I shall not give up hope that in time the piece will give you greater pleasure."

Whether or not she changed her mind is not known. Auer, however, later recanted his criticism and the piece became an audience favorite, for it contains everything one could

possibly want in a concerto — a showy solo part, a wonderful interplay with other instruments in the orchestra and an achingly beautiful melodic line.

"And it's so much fun!" Gluzman says.

Another fun piece on the Marin Symphony program comes from Stravinsky, who was a great admirer of Tchaikovsky's work. Also from a family of professional musicians, Stravinsky was taken to an opera when he was 11 and caught a glimpse of the great Russian composer two weeks before his death. Stravinsky later said, "This image has remained in the retina of my memory all my life."

In 1928, he paid homage to his predecessor by arranging some of Tchaikovsky's works into a ballet called "The Fairy's Kiss." The Marin Symphony program includes the Divertimento from this ballet, as well as Stravinsky's Symphony in Three Movements.

There's more to this Celtic knot, of course, but how much is necessary to understand in order to enjoy the music?

"You don't have to be educated," Gluzman says. "You simply have to listen. We don't need to go to school to recognize beauty."