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A BEETHOVEN, MENDELSSOHN AND BRAHMS EVENING

Reviewers Name: Donna S. Kline

Company Reviewed: Marin Symphony

Soloist/s: Elizabeth Pitcairn, violin

Performance: Sunday at 7:30pm

Location: Marin Civic Center

Performance Date: 2007-11-04

There was hardly an empty seat in Marin's Civic Center auditorium last Sunday night. The Marin Symphony's second concert of the 2007-08 season was performed to a packed audience of Marin music enthusiasts who were looking forward to an evening of Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Brahms.

The first work on the program was **Beethoven's Overture to Leonore No. 3, Opus 72b**. Beethoven's overtures are almost like dramas in miniature, and while Beethoven composed a total of four overtures for his only opera, the No. 3 performed by the Marin Symphony last night is perhaps his most celebrated. Mr. Neale and the orchestra were in top form when the overture opened with the majestic and familiar adagio. The principal theme was played, which was then echoed by the violins and flute. The balances between the woodwinds, brass and the strings were--in this reviewer's opinion--well played, not an easy task in the cavernous expanse of the Civic Center auditorium. The off-stage trumpet call was also beautifully performed, only adding to the drama of Beethoven's famous overture.

The highlight of the concert was the performance of Mendelssohn's Concerto for Violin in E-minor, Opus 64. Performed by the talented and upcoming violinist, Elizabeth Pitcairn, on her 1720 Stradivari "Red" violin (once owned by Felix Mendelssohn), it was an evening to remember. While Mendelssohn was a prolific composer during his short life, he composed only one concerto for violin--and in this reviewer's opinion--it is one of the most lyrical and lovable works in the repertory. It is interesting to note that Mendelssohn directed that his three movement concerto be played without pause, and for the most part, Ms. Pitcairn and the orchestra complied with the composer's wishes---with only a slight pause between the first and second movements. The orchestra, under the baton of Mr. Neale, with Ms. Pitcairn's solo performance, played this melodic and famous work "con amore." Although this reviewer has heard the first movement sometimes performed a little slower than Ms. Pitcairn's allegro performance, it was still an inspired rendition.

After a short intermission, the last work on the program was Brahms Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Opus 73. Brahms composed four symphonies during his lifetime, the First being of epic-like proportions, and the Second Symphony being of an entirely different character. Brahms's First symphony is often thought of as "epic and tragic", but his Second is thought of as more pastoral. The Second Symphony is in four movements, with the pastoral nature of the first movement continuing into the second. The orchestra and Mr. Neale rose to the challenge. While the string section played the reflective principal melodies with great beauty, the horns, oboes and flutes seemed to have a greater challenge with the very difficult lyrical passages that echoed the theme played by the strings. Yet, as difficult as this symphony is, Mr. Neale led the orchestra to the prevailing idyllic mood and passion that Brahms intended.
