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SYMPHONY REVIEW

[Marin Symphony](#) / January 20, 2008

[Vadim Gluzman](#) / [Alasdair Neale](#)

Opposite Attractions

By [Terry McNeill](#)

A conventional all-Russian program sidetracked the Marin Symphony's "Salute to the Silver Screen" season theme Jan. 20, but few seemed to miss the cinematic connections. All evening the playing was first rank, and violinist Vadim Gluzman's interpretation of the Tchaikovsky concerto provided plenty of pyrotechnical sizzle to excite an audience that not quite filled the Marin Veteran's Auditorium. The Sunday symphony concerts are usually full, but perhaps a three-day weekend, cold temperatures, and television football combined to lower attendance.

The first half included two Stravinsky works, composed little more than 15 years apart, but sharply different in texture and scope. The Divertimento from the 1928 ballet *The Fairy's Kiss* was a tour de force for winds, always a Stravinsky specialty. Conductor Alasdair Neale led a supple performance with elegant solos in the opening Sinfonia from flutist Monica Daniel-Barker, principal clarinetist Arthur Austin, and a sensuous movement-ending horn solo by Meredith Brown.

Although Neale chose quick tempos in the concluding movements, lovely duos from cellist Jan Volkert and both Austin and Daniel-Barker characterized the charm of Stravinsky's borrowings from Tchaikovsky, as did the bassoon playing of Carla Wilson. The offbeat accents were rendered precisely throughout.

Far less listener friendly is the *Symphony in Three Movements* (1942-45), where the driving rhythms grab your attention from the beginning. A few dropped notes from the horns could not diminish the impact of the opening Allegro, which features music similar to the *Symphony of Psalms* (1930) that at times presaged the minimalism of John Adams. Stravinsky's episodic score drew a focused and propulsive performance from Neale's forces. Clearly the orchestra had spent substantial rehearsal time on the symphony. The balances between sections were always distinct, and the linear development never blurred, even at fortissimo levels.

An Old Favorite Freshened Up

The Tchaikovsky Concerto in D Major, Op. 35, came as a warm wash of sound after the two Stravinsky works, and soloist Gluzman brought the technical virtuosity needed to make the familiar piece fresh again. His opening notes were slightly off-center, but everything that came afterward was sui generis — fast slides, languorous ritards, a rich bottom-end tone, subtly varied vibrato, and in the Allegro vivacissimo, an exhilarating spiccato (bouncing) bow technique.

Gluzman is a formidable violinist, his long black frock coat recalling violinists of Tchaikovsky's time like Wilhelm, Auer, Sarasate, and Joachim. His tone and clarity at pianissimo volume were particularly impressive. The trill that ends the work's demonic cadenza was captivating, carrying to the top rows of the large hall.

The second movement, the *Canzonetta* in G Minor, was lovingly played. No two phrases were alike in Gluzman's solos, and he joined clarinetist Austin for a fetching duo in the movement's middle section. Large fluctuations of tempo and the music's playful motives made the finale a romp. Neale drove the orchestra at a furious clip, nearly losing control toward the coda. But it should be played that fast, as long as the musicians have the mastery to stay together. Here, they certainly did.

Gluzman received a long, loud standing ovation, prompting an encore. I suspect the short piece was by Gluzman, as it was an improbable pastiche of Bach in which the Partita in E Major, the Chaconne, and other snippets appeared and bounced away. It made a less than satisfying encore, but the evening was a violinistic triumph, and the assembly was won again.

Santa Rosa resident Terry McNeill produces classical piano recitals in the three-county Concerts Grand series, and he is currently researching the lives and artistry of keyboard titans Anton Rubinstein and Josef Hoffmann.

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