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SYMPHONY REVIEW

[Marin Symphony](#) / October 9, 2007

[The Battleship Potemkin](#)

Battle Ready

By [Terry McNeill](#)

The Marin Symphony launched its 55th season with a nearly impossible task — keep a full house at the Marin Civic Center concentrating on the music from the stage during a simultaneous screening of the famous film *The Battleship Potemkin*. But it worked on Tuesday, thanks to generous portions of at least four Shostakovich symphonies that sustained the silent movie masterpiece by Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein.

The film, which depicts a 1905 on-ship rebellion of Russian sailors and the revolt's ill-fated support from the citizens of the port city of Odessa, has had several musical scores appended since its release in 1925, the last being the pastiche from Shostakovich in 1976, a year after his death. But what a pastiche — the greatest of 20th-century symphonists built a sonic structure of immense power and orchestral splendor. The 75-minute adventure combined big sections of the Fourth, Fifth, Tenth, and Eleventh Symphonies with surprisingly sharp black-and-white footage to achieve a potent, arctic whole that brought the house to its feet, albeit somewhat drained from the experience.



Scene from *The Battleship Potemkin*

Conductor Alasdair Neale, in his seventh year on the podium, led a taught performance of the large forces assembled. The horn section particularly shone during the battle scenes. The Fifth Symphony (1937) dominated early in the film, and a personal favorite, the Mahlerian Fourth (1936), was heard in the atmospheric cinema parts in which mists settle over the warship. Eisenstein's renowned Odessa dock scene, where Cossacks massacre terrified citizens fleeing down a seemingly endless broad staircase, found its parallel in Shostakovich's "Tocsin" (alarm signal) from the finale of the Eleventh Symphony (1957). Here Neale built a formidable deluge of sound, juxtaposing a resounding march with drums and chimes in G minor while the rest of the orchestra remained in G major.

It was a frightening moment, as the palpable horror on the citizen's faces was perfectly mirrored in the music. Particularly striking was the haunting clarinet playing of Arthur Austin and Meredith Brown in their resounding English horn solos, at the point in the film where the Czarist fleet approaches the rebellious battleship.

In the end, the Symphony's "Season of the Silver Screen" theme was well-served by a master cinematic director,

a commanding composer, and the consummate playing of the Marin musicians.

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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Comments

McNeil writes: "Particularly striking was the haunting clarinet playing of Arthur Austin and Meredith Brown in their resounding English horn solos"

Art Austin is Principal Clarinet. Not English horn.

Meredith Brown is the acting principal /horn/. Not English horn. Meredith is also one person, not many.

Posted by Darby Hinshaw on October 16, 2007 at 8:04 pm

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