

AN AMBITIOUS LAST CONCERT OF THE SEASON

Reviewers Name: Donna S. Kline

Company Reviewed: Marin Symphony

Soloist/s: Rebecca Evans, soprano

Performance: Last Concert of the Marin Symphony Season

Location: Marin Civic Center

Performance Date: 2007-05-01

This past Tuesday evening, the last of six concerts given by the Marin Symphony 2006-2007 concert season was performed to a packed and enthusiastic audience of Marin music lovers. This last concert--an all Richard Strauss program--consisted of three different works, ranging from the late German composer's earliest works to his latest.

The concert opened with Strauss's early "Wind Serenade in E-flat Major, Op. 7." This work was composed when Strauss was only 18 and requires only 13 wind instruments on stage. While classical in style and tone, this reviewer was reminded of the serenades of Mozart, Schubert, and other composers of the classical period. Yet, one could also hear hints of later Strauss in this work, especially in some of the harmonic structures he used. With the exception of an uneven or "jagged" beginning, Maestro Neale and the members of the Wind section of the symphony managed to make this an interesting beginning to the evening's concert program, especially reaching their sounds to the back of the vast hall of the Marin County Civic Center.

The second work, "Four Last Songs," was beautifully sung by soprano, Rebecca Evans. Strauss composed over 200 lieder during his lifetime, but the "Four Last Songs" are considered to be his most nostalgic. The cycle consists of "Fruling" (Spring); "September"; "Beim Schlafengehen" (Going to Sleep); and "Im Abendrot" (At Sunset.) Based on the poems of Hermann Hesse, Joseph von Eichendorff, these are lieder that reflect Strauss's fulfillment of a good life and the acceptance of his death. Ms. Evan's voice is well suited for these beautiful works, however, this reviewer could not understand or hear the lyrics although seated halfway back from the stage. This music seems to be better suited for a smaller space. An insert for the German poems with the English translation was in the program, but one could not read them because the lights were too dim. It is unfortunate the audience could not follow along in order to appreciate the beauty of the poetry with the lyrical beauty of the Strauss music.

The last and most ambitious work of the evening was Strauss's "Ein Heldenleben" (A Hero's Life), Op. 40. This is a symphonic tone poem which depicts the composer, Strauss, as the hero and his critics as his adversaries. Organized into six sections or movements, this work is a seamless flow with no break between sections. The only coherence throughout this work is the use of the leitmotif or theme depicting Strauss, his wife, Paulina, and his adversaries or critics. Strauss uses the horns, cellos, and violas to represent the Hero (Strauss), while the violin solo in the third section is his wife's. Performed by violinist, Jeremy Constant, this was the most lyrical section and the best to this reviewer's ears. Constant is a virtuoso violinist. His performance was stunning. The audience was spellbound listening to every lyrical note and phrase he played. There was no trouble hearing his virtuoso interpretation during this section. "Ein Heldenleben" ends like the "Four Last Songs," in a "tranquil and pastoral end to a Hero's life as he reflects on the episodes of his past."

The concert ended with a wonderful encore tribute to the retiring flautist member of the symphony, who performed the second movement from Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Harp. After a slightly embarrassing start, this beautiful work was performed with perfection and great feeling. The retiring member received many well-earned accolades, including flowers and congratulations from members of the symphony. It was a perfect ending to a sterling concert season.

