

Wednesday, September 20, 2017

OPENING NIGHT: Delaware Symphony Orchestra

By Christine Facciolo



Classical music devotees savored a *Fifth of Beethoven* at The Grand Friday, September 15, as the **Delaware Symphony Orchestra** kicked off what promises to be one of the most ambitious seasons in its 111-year history.

But before the orchestra rolled up its sleeves for the Beethoven, it offered up some lighter fare, courtesy of Prokofiev and Mozart.

Prokofiev subtitled his *Symphony No. 1* (1917) the “Classical Symphony,” in homage to Haydn. Prokofiev’s ability to blend his 20th Century voice with the style of the great classicist is indeed remarkable, making this one of his most popular works.

The piece is usually performed by a large modern orchestra. But here, the orchestra was pared down appropriately, giving the music a lighter texture. The string work throughout was captivating. The Gavotte proceeded with its dislocated tune and plodding rhythm, while the final movement bubbled along at an exhilarating pace, producing many admiring smiles and enthusiastic applause.

Mozart’s *Concerto for Flute, Harp and Orchestra* (K.299/297c) was the companion piece on the first half, an apt choice, since Haydn influenced Mozart as well as Prokofiev. Amado partnered DSO principals Kimberly Reighley (flute) and Sara Fuller (harp) who gave a poised yet exuberant reading of this finely wrought work. The orchestra carried out its supporting role with as much commitment as if it were center-stage, befitting the intimate nature of the piece, especially the flowing *Andantino*.

After intermission, Amado and the orchestra got down to business with a performance of Beethoven's Fifth, certainly the most well-known – possibly the most beloved – work ever created.

Familiarity can breed contempt but not in this case. As Amado pointed out, there is always something new and interesting to discover in Beethoven's Fifth. First, were those introductory notes really the hammer blows of fate knocking at the composer's door? Probably not. A theory developed in the 1990s holds that those famous fortissimo phrases were influenced by Luigi Cherubini's "Hymn du Pantheon." Cherubini was a prominent composer during the French Revolution. Beethoven was a passionate supporter of the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Amado also pointed out the symmetry within the symphony's first eight notes as well as the thematic and harmonic relationships between its movements.

If you listen to the Fifth largely on recordings, it's easy to forget how thrilling a live performance can be. This was a beautifully focused, fully energized performance of the Fifth with all the necessary elements in place: sonorous strings, flawless brass playing, full-bodied winds and above, a sense of drama and grandeur. The insistent C on the timpani had a palpable presence here, offering an effective set-up for the glorious, fortissimo rising chords that usher in the finale.

For full season info, see www.delawaresymphony.org.

Posted by [Michelle Kramer-Fitzgerald](#)