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Review: Hear This: the Minnesota Sinfonia

By Rob Hubbard

Are you suffering from orchestral withdrawal? Have the management lockouts that have erased the Minnesota Orchestra and St. Paul Chamber Orchestra from the Twin Cities cultural calendar left you longing to hear the sound of a stirring symphony or crisp concerto once again?

The Minnesota Sinfonia is here to help. The Twin Cities' second-best professional chamber orchestra may not play with the expert quality of the SPCO, but it beats it on price (its concerts are free), the soloists are often outstanding and the atmosphere invariably welcoming.

And the soloist at this weekend's Minnesota Sinfonia concerts is one definitely worth catching. South Korean violinist Hye-Jin Kim demonstrated on Friday night, March 15, a flamboyant performing style and a tone pure and clear enough to enwrap the audience at St. Paul's Johnson High School Auditorium in romantic rapture.



For this was a decidedly romantic program, boasting emotional showpieces by 19th-century Polish composer Henryk Wieniawski and an orchestral arrangement of Peter Tchaikovsky's "Souvenir de Florence" by the orchestra's artistic director and conductor, Jay Fishman. Lest you think that the romantic era requires a larger orchestra, you should know that this 26-member ensemble created a pretty big sound.

As did Kim. **She opened with Mozart's Rondo in C, serving notice immediately that her sense of showmanship was as acute as her interpretive acumen.** She kept things appropriately breezy on the Rondo, **her sound sweet and mellifluous throughout.** Wieniawski's "Legende" and "Scherzo Tarantelle" proved ideal fits for Kim's style, the first a sad, haunting aria on **which her lines floated atop dark, undulating waves of strings, the second a fleet, fiery-fingered explosion of excitement.**

The concert opened with the premiere of an engaging work by Minneapolis composer Sarah Miller. Her "Hans Christian Andersen Suite" featured three movements inspired by different Andersen fairy tales, each an instrumental work that had the feel of a ripping yarn, particularly the high-contrast give-and-take of "Great Claus and Little Claus."

In Fishman's hands, Tchaikovsky's "Souvenir de Florence" is ever expanding outward, his latest arrangement adding winds to his previous string orchestra version of the chamber work. But the most powerful moments were fairly close to the original, as when cellist Diane Tremaine lent lovely lyricism to an engrossing Adagio. There were times when the orchestra seemed to be trodding this fresh turf a tad too reticently, eschewing aggression

where the music called for it and not letting solo lines sing out with conviction. But it galloped along grandly toward its conclusion.