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## MUSIC REVIEW: BSO gives shining performance of 'Ascending Light'

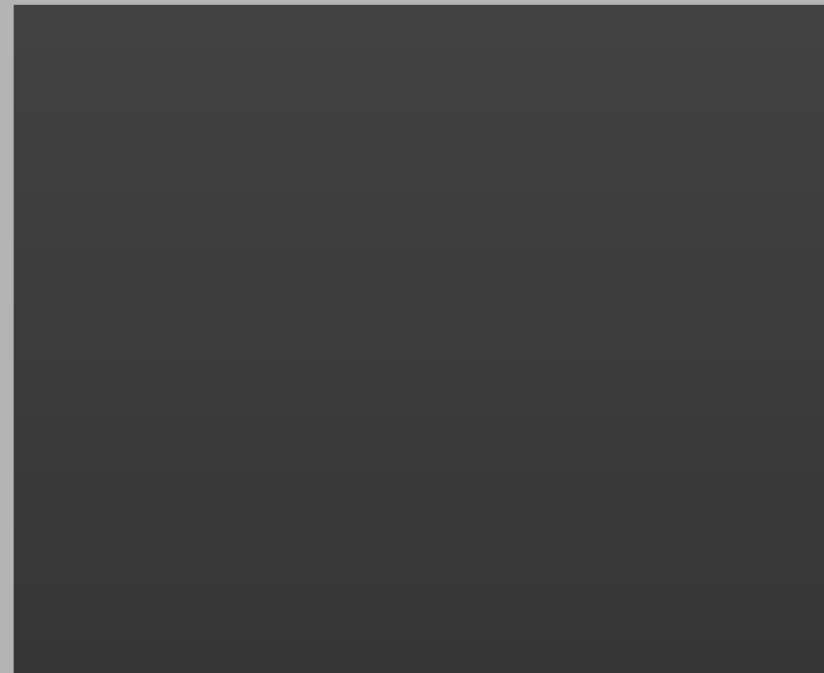
To commemorate anniversary of the Armenian genocide, the Boston Symphony Orchestra's exhilarating premiere of Michael Gandolfi's music acknowledged past tragedies without resorting to guilt or blame.

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Liza Voll

From left, BSO conductor Andris Nelsons and organist Olivier Latry.





From left, BSO conductor Andris Nelsons and organist Olivier Latry.

Liza Voll

### BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Gandolfi and Mahler, Andris Nelsons, conductor, March 26-28 and March 31 at Symphony Hall, 301 Mass. Ave., Boston. [www.bso.org](http://www.bso.org).

joined by a single, sustained pedal point in the organ, with differing moods. The first, triumphant and engaging; the second reverential, spiritual.

“Ascending Light” begins with a heartbeat, from the timpani, and chords on organ. Symmetrical standing brass (trombone and trumpet) flank each side of the orchestra, adding fanfare-like color. After this attention-grabbing intro, the soloist begins a simple canon, mimicked afterward by the violins. This begins an extended series of doublings—soloist/strings, then flutes, then trumpets—

### By Keith Powers For The Patriot Ledger

Posted Mar. 27, 2015 at 1:36 PM  
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The Boston Symphony Orchestra reinvigorated the past in two contrasting ways Thursday evening at Symphony Hall. With an exhilarating premiere from Michael Gandolfi, “Ascending Light,” which commemorates the anniversary of the Armenian genocide, the orchestra acknowledged past tragedies without resorting to guilt or blame.

And, thanks to the enthusiastic artistry of music director Andris Nelsons, the orchestra revisited the complex legacy of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony, infusing that demanding score with energy and alert musical attention.

Gandolfi’s “Ascending Light,” composed for organ (the inimitable Olivier Latry) and orchestra, was originally commissioned to remember the BSO’s longtime organist, the Armenian Berj Zamkochian, who passed away in 2004. In time the project grew to become a commemoration of the centennial of the Armenian tragedy as well.

But “Ascending Light” is no requiem. It has a simple, elegant structure: Two movements,

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which characterizes the work.

It's not a concerto, not in any typical sense at least. Latry certainly has an extended part, and introduces most of the new ideas. But "Ascending Light" is built around give and take, a kind of "me now, then you" relationship between soloist and orchestra.

The second movement incorporates two folk borrowings: first, a theme and variations built around an Armenian lullaby, and later, a quieter melody that gives the piece its title.

The lullaby, set off by the organ in the right hand, but later developed by oboe and clarinet, giving it a klezmer feeling, leads eventually through its variations to a type of scherzo. A magical moment at the center, built around the flute, with an extended drone in the strings, was riveting.

There were many broad ideas in the second movement, but the overall sense of reverential introspective pervaded. Latry, although he had no cadenza to flash his skills, stood out for his collaborative partnering. Nelsons conducted as if he had led the score dozens of times.

The musical intention of "Ascending Light"—an enlightened celebration of human perseverance—was thoroughly delivered. Taking rare advantage of the forceful BSO organ, it should remain in the orchestra's repertory long after this centenary has passed.

Mahler's Sixth Symphony has spawned an industry of combative ideas. Rightly so.

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