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## Review: From jam sessi

By **KEITH POWERS**  
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April 07, 2014

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HYANNIS — Passion has many expressions.

From the white-hot inspirations of Chris Brubeck, through the agonized meditations of Massenet, and culminating in the pathos of Tchaikovsky, the Cape Cod Symphony Orchestra explored an exhilarating range of them Saturday at the Barnstable Performing Arts Center.

The emotional showpiece of the "Letting Go" concert was certainly Brubeck's "Spontaneous Combustion," a jam-session violin concerto written for firebrand fiddler Nicolas Kendall. Brubeck, part of the jazz royal family, and Kendall, a Curtis graduate who explores alternative music, ideas and venues with his trio Time for Three, created the concerto after a series of improvisation sessions. Although the work is almost entirely notated now, it maintains the supercharged energy of a late night free-for-all among musicians.

"Spontaneous Combustion" has three movements, with the typical fast-slow-fast style. Tradition ends there. It also has a drum kit (Matt Scarano) smack in the middle of the stage, and an occasionally amplified soloist who begins the concerto walking down the aisles through the audience, and requires a blast of energy from the orchestra (and conductor Jung-Ho Pak).

It was certainly not a typical concert opener. The first and last movements had the good-time feel of a roadhouse fiddling show: In the first, highlighted by jazz and bluegrass suggestions, Kendall spent most of his time jamming with Scarano. In the finale, the violinist worked over an extended ostinato in the orchestra, with the ensemble occasionally shifting to double the soloist's lines, a clever technique.

It was the middle movement that made the most musical sense. It began with a quiet gesture: Both orchestra and soloist at first appeared to be tuning up, but that arrhythmic, almost uncoordinated playing morphed easily into a striking solo melody by Kendall. The melody flowed through the movement, which ended in an equally striking way with the soloist double-stopping a long, soft line low in his instrument.

Demands on the soloist were extreme. The same could be said of the orchestra, which rocked. As did maestro Pak, who danced his way through the whole piece on the podium — it was the only way such a work could be conducted. Afterward, Kendall quieted all the hubbub with an encore showpiece of Massenet's delicate "Meditation from Thaïs," an engaging duet with harpist Sandra Bittermann. Both played splendidly.

Intermission was needed for all, on- and offstage, after that blast of music-making. But the passions had yet to be fully explored. Tchaikovsky's last symphony, the shape-changing "Pathétique," was conducted only nine days before his mysterious death. In style, it breaks down many musical boundaries. With its passionate energy, it leaves almost no emotional stone unturned.

The shockingly long first movement challenges the winds and horns, with extended and exposed solo sections. While the result was not always note-perfect, the musical possibilities were intelligently examined.

A certain fatigue from the extreme emotional and musical swings eventually set in. The second movement needed a little more rhythmic direction, and the third — the familiar presto — was played sharply, but the balance was all off, with the brass sounding way too loud to convey the musical intent. The finale, an anti-climactic slow movement, has always been a challenge for audiences to appreciate, and for musicians to articulate. Pak eked the last bit of energy from his ensemble to accomplish it, and all appeared totally spent by the effort.

### In concert

What: Cape Cod Symphony Orchestra, Jung-Ho Pak conducting

Where: Barnstable Performing Arts Center, 744 West Main St., Hyannis

When: Saturday evening, Sunday afternoon

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