



Cape Symphony deserves favor

Tuesday

Posted May 9, 2017 at 3:33 PM

Updated May 9, 2017 at 3:33 PM

Shostakovich and his world got explored on two fronts Sunday afternoon in a unique collaboration at the Barnstable High School Performing Arts Center.

By Keith Powers / Contributing writer

HYANNIS –Shostakovich and his world got explored on two fronts Sunday afternoon in a unique collaboration at the Barnstable High School Performing Arts Center. The Cotuit Center for the Arts joined the Cape Symphony for the unusual play-with-orchestra, “Every Good Boy Deserves Favour.” The orchestra then tackled Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony.

The play – itself a collaboration between composer André Previn and playwright Tom Stoppard – examines the harrowing Soviet system of “justice” during the Stalin years. The symphony, premiered in 1937, was a product of that very system.

It seemed like an inspired combination of artistic ideas and forms – and it was, to a point. Like any artistic inspiration, the execution must be thorough and sound for it to prove successful.

“Every Good Boy Deserves Favour,” premiered in 1977, portrays the imprisonment of a Soviet dissident in a mental institution. Alexander Ivanov (played by Rob Anderson) shares a cell with a “real” mentally disturbed patient, also named Alexander Ivanov (Troy Davies), who hears a symphony orchestra in his head, constantly.

The dissident Ivanov faces the choice that many did: admit that your protests are part of your “mental illness,” and you can go free. We witness his interrogation with the Doctor (Cleo Zani), we see his bereft son Sasha (Tyler Brackett) in school, but mostly we watch the imagined musical antics of the other Ivanov, fulfilled by the Cape Symphony musicians.

Davies mugged his way through multiple orchestral interludes – partly conducting, partly interpreting with clever gestures, the various instrumental sections. This became the main issue with the slow-moving story: Davies' physical humor was inventive, choreographed with insight – but it dragged on much too long.

The play itself really was just one idea – a brave dissident staying true to his ideals – and its ending, with both Ivanovs freed thanks to bureaucratic incompetence, mixing them up due to their names, was a *deus-ex-machina* of the most flimsy contrivance.

The orchestra played wonderfully, but Previn's music was mock-Shostakovich. There were nice solo parts for principal cellist Bo Ericsson, concertmaster Jae Cosmos Lee, and a clarinet/oboe duo (principals Mark Miller and Elizabeth Mitnik Doriss), but generally the music served the colorful antics of Ivanov's imagination.

The real Shostakovich is another matter. Conductor Jung-Ho Pak and his orchestra re-established true intensity and artistic drama after intermission with a direct, informed reading of the Fifth.

A challenging work of great length and shifting notions, veering from comic to impossibly lyric, from boldly dramatic to light-as-a-feather, the Fifth comes from the relatively early period in the composer's life.

Already accomplished, and already criticized deeply for those accomplishments, Shostakovich would spend most of his compositional life negotiating a path between artistic integrity and the perilous possibilities of Stalin's regime.

In the Fifth, artistic integrity has no problem winning the day. The truth was in the music. When he wrote a fanfare, it was bold and loud. When he wrote a scherzo – like this amazing second movement – it ventured into musical humor and ungainly proportions with gusto. And when he wrote lyrically, like this unforgettable third movement *largo*, the results could be heartbreaking.

There was much to appreciate. The orchestration and part-writing for one: In that touching *largo*, each of the string sections were divided in two, the front desks of both the firsts and seconds playing one figure, the back desks answering with another. The cello section was divided into two different parts right down the middle at times. All this while the winds were carving out gorgeous solo lines.

And in the scherzo, the shifts in ideas – klezmer one moment, then ragged waltzes, marching band ditties, country fiddling – was thrilling, a sweep of musical notions with no seeming end.

This made an appropriately inspired conclusion to the Cape Symphony's subscription season. Before the performance, Pak acknowledged his retiring principal cello, who leaves after more than two decades with the orchestra. Bo Ericsson has led his section with distinction throughout, soloing gracefully when called upon, making sure his desk-mates brought a unified, precise tone to their ensemble playing as well.

The Cape Symphony performs the John F. Kennedy Centennial Commemoration concert at 5 p.m. May 29 Barnstable High School Performing Arts Center. Tickets and information: www.capesymphony.org or 508-362-1111.

Cape Symphony deserves favor

Tuesday

Posted May 9, 2017 at 3:33 PM

Updated May 9, 2017 at 3:33 PM

Shostakovich and his world got explored on two fronts Sunday afternoon in a unique collaboration at the Barnstable High School Performing Arts Center.

By Keith Powers / Contributing writer

HYANNIS –Shostakovich and his world got explored on two fronts Sunday afternoon in a unique collaboration at the Barnstable High School Performing Arts Center. The Cotuit Center for the Arts joined the Cape Symphony for the unusual play-with-orchestra, “Every Good Boy Deserves Favour.” The orchestra then tackled Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony.

The play – itself a collaboration between composer André Previn and playwright Tom Stoppard – examines the harrowing Soviet system of “justice” during the Stalin years. The symphony, premiered in 1937, was a product of that very system.

It seemed like an inspired combination of artistic ideas and forms – and it was, to a point. Like any artistic inspiration, the execution must be thorough and sound for it to prove successful.

“Every Good Boy Deserves Favour,” premiered in 1977, portrays the imprisonment of a Soviet dissident in a mental institution. Alexander Ivanov (played by Rob Anderson) shares a cell with a “real” mentally disturbed patient, also named Alexander Ivanov (Troy Davies), who hears a symphony orchestra in his head, constantly.

The dissident Ivanov faces the choice that many did: admit that your protests are part of your “mental illness,” and you can go free. We witness his interrogation with the Doctor (Cleo Zani), we see his bereft son Sasha (Tyler Brackett) in school, but mostly we watch the imagined musical antics of the other Ivanov, fulfilled by the Cape Symphony musicians.

Davies mugged his way through multiple orchestral interludes – partly conducting, partly interpreting with clever gestures, the various instrumental sections. This became the main issue with the slow-moving story: Davies’ physical humor was inventive, choreographed with insight – but it dragged on much too long.

The play itself really was just one idea – a brave dissident staying true to his ideals – and its ending, with both Ivanovs freed thanks to bureaucratic incompetence, mixing them up due to their names, was a *deus-ex-machina* of the most flimsy contrivance.

The orchestra played wonderfully, but Previn’s music was mock-Shostakovich. There were nice solo parts for principal cellist Bo Ericsson, concertmaster Jae Cosmos Lee, and a clarinet/oboe duo (principals Mark Miller and Elizabeth Mitnik Doriss), but generally the music served the colorful antics of Ivanov’s imagination.

The real Shostakovich is another matter. Conductor Jung-Ho Pak and his orchestra re-established true intensity and artistic drama after intermission with a direct, informed reading of the Fifth.

A challenging work of great length and shifting notions, veering from comic to impossibly lyric, from boldly dramatic to light-as-a-feather, the Fifth comes from the relatively early period in the composer’s life.

Already accomplished, and already criticized deeply for those accomplishments, Shostakovich would spend most of his compositional life negotiating a path between artistic integrity and the perilous possibilities of Stalin’s regime.

In the Fifth, artistic integrity has no problem winning the day. The truth was in the music. When he wrote a fanfare, it was bold and loud. When he wrote a scherzo – like this amazing second movement – it ventured into musical humor and ungainly proportions with gusto. And when he wrote lyrically, like this unforgettable third movement largo, the results could be heartbreaking.

There was much to appreciate. The orchestration and part-writing for one: In that touching largo, each of the string sections were divided in two, the front desks of both the firsts and seconds playing one figure, the back desks answering with another. The cello section was divided into two different parts right down the middle at times. All this while the winds were carving out gorgeous solo lines.

And in the scherzo, the shifts in ideas – klezmer one moment, then ragged waltzes, marching band ditties, country fiddling – was thrilling, a sweep of musical notions with no seeming end.

This made an appropriately inspired conclusion to the Cape Symphony's subscription season. Before the performance, Pak acknowledged his retiring principal cello, who leaves after more than two decades with the orchestra. Bo Ericsson has led his section with distinction throughout, soloing gracefully when called upon, making sure his desk-mates brought a unified, precise tone to their ensemble playing as well.

The Cape Symphony performs the John F. Kennedy Centennial Commemoration concert at 5 p.m. May 29 Barnstable High School Performing Arts Center. Tickets and information: www.capesymphony.org or 508-362-1111.

ADVERTISING

