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MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN VETERANS

SATURDAY, JUNE 14 • 8:30AM-3:30PM • NICHOLS COLLEGE STUDENT CENTER • 124 CENTER ROAD • DUDLEY, MA

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Review: NBSO offer

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By **Keith Powers**
Contributing writer
May 14, 2014 10:30 AM

It takes a long time to get to Neptune.

With an extravagant performance that included Gustav Holst's magnificent "The Planets," accompanied by a film excursion to outer space, and Max Bruch's tuneful violin showpiece "Scottish Fantasy," the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Maestro David MacKenzie, brought its 2013-14 season to a close before a sold-out house Saturday evening in the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center.

It was a lengthy program that featured two accessible classics, superbly played by the orchestra, a soloist with a taste for adventure, and a filmic documentary that encapsulated recent scientific ventures into the solar system.

Violinist Rachel Barton Pine turned in the guest honors with Bruch's popular work for soloist, which is broadly drawn from Scottish folk tunes. Bruch worked with some of the greatest violinists of his day (Joachim, Sarasate), and his two concertos and this fantasy show his mastery of the instrument's possibilities.

The Fantasy has four movements (after a brief, anomalous, slow introduction), all with some popular origin. The score demands great virtuosity from the soloist, as well as from the orchestra's harpist. Although there are Scottish flavors — a bagpipe-like drone created from double stops on the violin is the most notable — Bruch has transformed the folk melodies' Scottish flavor into a lushly Romantic work, his forte.

Barton could have used some help with the opening, which sounded a bit wooden in its deliberate tempo. The middle sections had real life: the orchestra (especially the strings, which had lively, forceful unity throughout the evening; credit to MacKenzie and to concertmaster Jesse Holstein), played with alert sensitivity.

The harpist, who provides emotional accompaniment, especially in the middle two movements, had difficulty rising above the volume of the orchestra and soloist. When Katie Koglin's part was articulated, it sounded precise and sweeping. She was seated squarely in the middle of the stage, just behind soloist and conductor, and it seemed like it was as much a problem with the hall as anything else (reports from other parts of the room were better than this listener's). But it diminished the effect — no fault of Koglin's terrific playing.

Holst's great orchestral work, "The Planets," creates seven creatively orchestrated movements, one for each of the known planets at the time (it was composed in 1917). Holst's imagination was fired by the astrologic power of the planets, not by any mythological suggestions, and certainly not by any real interest in science.

The music is, well, heavenly. Holst's programmatic power turns each of the the movements into a genuine musical portrait of what he imagined a person's character might be — war-like, jolly, mystical, etc. — under that planet's influence.

The accompanying film showed real and computer-generated imagery from exploratory missions like the Voyagers and Galileo spacecrafts. Maestro MacKenzie read from prepared notes before each of the movements, detailing some of the more impressive solar system discoveries of our age.

The film, and the interjected comments, were a terrible distraction from the music, and interrupted any momentum that Holst's score might have developed. The playing, however, was extraordinary. Individual solos were too numerous to enumerate entirely; Holstein, flutist Timothy Macri, cellist Shay Rudolph and Paul Phillips on celeste all shone in solo moments. The winds played sections of impeccably unity. Frequent exposed horn solos stood out for their clarity as well.

With a sold out hall, youth scholarships being announced from the stage at intermission, an outsized program, and the superbly sounding orchestra, the 2013-14 NBSO season closed with much to celebrate.

At intermission NBSO CEO David Prentiss announced this year's winners of the Lillian Lamoureux scholarships.

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COUPON OF THE WEEK

Keegan Marshall House, a pianist and sophomore at New Bedford High, and Keren Satkin, a flutist who lives in Westport, is graduating from Old Rochester Regional High and will attend Boston Conservatory, each received \$1000.

The next NBSO performance will be the summer benefit, Symphony Seaside Swing, June 7 at the Kittansett Club in Marion. Information for Seaside Swing and about the 2014-15 season is available at www.nbsymphony.org or by calling (508) 999-6276.

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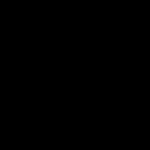
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- ▶ Classifieds
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- ▶ Real Estate
- ▶ Apartments
- ▶ Place an ad
- ▶ Local search

Interact

- ▶ Blogs
- ▶ RSS Feeds
- ▶ Rate / Review

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- ▶ Local
- ▶ State
- ▶ National
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Business
- ▶ Weather / Traffic
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- ▶ Religion

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- ▶ Photos
- ▶ Videos
- ▶ Out & About
- ▶ Submit a Photo

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- ▶ Dartmouth
- ▶ Fairhaven
- ▶ Fall River
- ▶ Freetown
- ▶ Lakeville
- ▶ Marion
- ▶ Mattapoisett
- ▶ Middleboro
- ▶ New Bedford
- ▶ Rehoboth
- ▶ Rochester
- ▶ Somerset
- ▶ Swansea
- ▶ Wareham
- ▶ Westport

Sports

- ▶ High School
- ▶ Red Sox
- ▶ Patriots
- ▶ Celtics
- ▶ Bruins
- ▶ Sports Blogs
- ▶ Sports Columns
- ▶ Golf Guide
- ▶ Youth Sports

Services

- ▶ Subscribe
- ▶ Email Alerts
- ▶ TextAlerts
- ▶ Mobile Shortcut
- ▶ Toolbar
- ▶ NIE

Lifestyle

- ▶ Health
- ▶ Gardens
- ▶ Outdoors
- ▶ Pets
- ▶ Family Room
- ▶ Weddings
- ▶ Columnists
- ▶ Waterfront Guide
- ▶ Family Milestones
- ▶ BookLovers

Entertainment

- ▶ Coastin'
- ▶ Movies
- ▶ Dining
- ▶ TV
- ▶ Sudoku
- ▶ Crossword
- ▶ More Games
- ▶ Calendar

Special Reports

- ▶ Immigration Raid
- ▶ Surviving Hard Times
- ▶ Casino
- ▶ A Nossa Vida
- ▶ Whaling in NB
- ▶ Half-Marathon
- ▶ Inauguration