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Review: Nth Degree's 'Under the Moon' speaks the language of love

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By Keith Powers
Contributing writer

Posted Mar. 13, 2016 at 10:56 PM
Updated at 11:11 PM

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Music can tell a story. Sometimes whole concerts tell a story. Or you can just let Jae Cosmos Lee tell you a story.

The Cape Symphony Orchestra's concertmaster, who curates the Nth Degree chamber series with his colleagues from the orchestra, wove a narrative of love Saturday evening at Falmouth Academy. His program, which he entitled "Under the Moon," included lushly romantic works by Dohnányi, Dvorak and Schoenberg.

Maybe at this point, at the tail end of winter, we all need a little boost. By selecting alluring repertory, and casually introducing the works with musical snippets and a good deal of humor, Lee made sure the evening came off like a successful first date.

Dohnányi's "Serenade" is one of his few chamber pieces that gets regular performances. Too bad — although his work hews to traditional forms and ideas, his musical ideas are alive and clever.

The "Serenade" — set for violin (Lee), viola (Irina Naryshkova) and cello (Megan Koch) — has five movements, introduced by a march (serenades were often written so that the rich patron of the

Zoom
Cape Symphony Orchestra concertmaster Jae Cosmos Lee, left, who curates the Nth Degree chamber series, presented the romantic works of Dohnanyi, Dvorak and Schoenberg Saturday night at Falmouth Academy. Courtesy of Cape Symphony



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Cape Symphony Orchestra concertmaster Jae Cosmos Lee, left, who curates the Nth Degree chamber series, presented the romantic works of Dohnanyi, Dvorak and Schoenberg Saturday night at Falmouth Academy. Courtesy

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room, accompanied by these openings).

The work is highlighted, however, by a fourth movement theme and variations. This is where the romance reaches its height, and Lee and colleagues demonstrated the main theme of the movement before beginning the performance. The variations come off more like slight divergencies from the main theme rather than bold explorations, but the playing — slow to get warmed up — was at its emotional best by this point.

Lee bowed tenderly during a languid and sweet second variation (there are five), and the succeeding one, changing pace to an uptempo style, lifted the energy, with Lee firing off rapid passages over active accompaniment.

The finale of "Serenade," a Rondo with lots of life, full of fast scales and double-stopped accents, actually brings back a hint of the opening march before coming to a slick ending.

Dvorak was a master of the chamber ensemble, and the inclusion of any of his music usually guarantees a concert's success. His "Terzetto," a trio for the unusual combination of two violins and viola (Lee joined by violinist Rhiannon Banerdt and violist Anya Shemetyeva) offers four seductive movements, including its own theme-and-variation closing.

All the movements had appeal. Banerdt, who took the first violin chair here, molded the clever Scherzo, with its folk-like inspirations. Playing ponticello (up close to the bridge), she added a vernacular, almost fiddler's feel to the rustic melody.

The theme of the finale was more of a statement than a tune, and the variations more like ideas than transformations, creating a fascinating alteration to the traditional form.

After intermission, Lee programmed Schoenberg's great sextet, "Verklärte Nacht."

No, not that Schoenberg. Not the composer who sent listeners running for the emergency exits with his twelve-tone, serial technique. This is the young Schoenberg, steeped in a hyper-Romantic mood, creating lush melodies and exploring them with exhilarating contrapuntal ideas.

The previous string players were joined by CSO's principal cello Bo Ericsson. "Verklärte Nacht" was inspired by a poem of devotion by Richard Dehmel, which Lee read before the performance (with some humorous sidebars). The ensemble also illustrated the climactic moment of the work, casting it in stronger relief for the audience when it actually appeared during the performance.

The work is dense and textural, with many challenges. Intonations occasionally suffered — a result of so much density. But the central idea of "Verklärte Nacht," a moving dialogue between lovers that shifts from confession to understanding and acceptance, came through with intense clarity.

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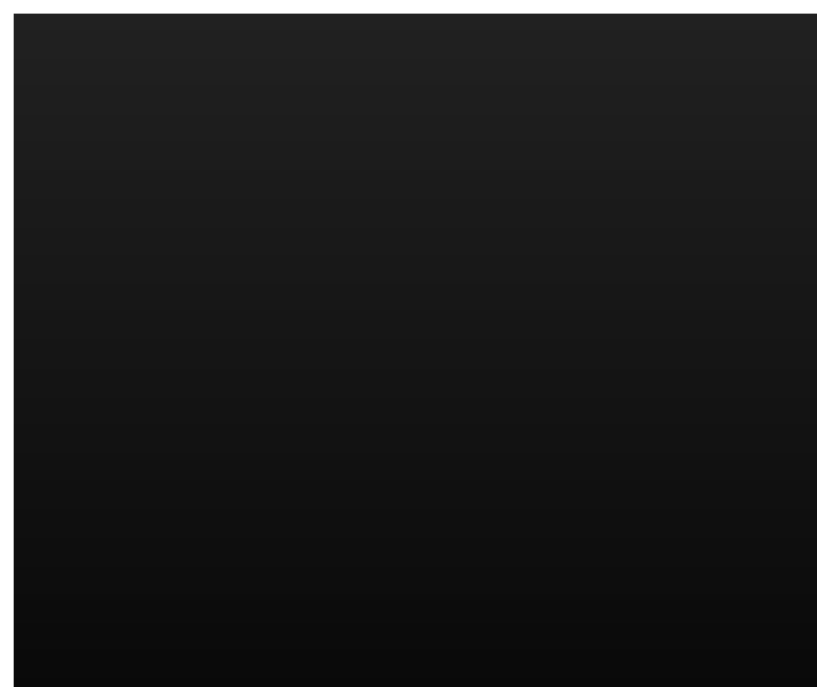
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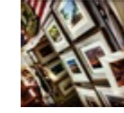
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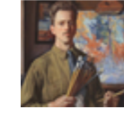
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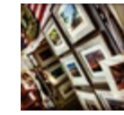
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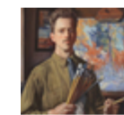
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