

NEW YORK ARTS

Valery Gergiev and the London Symphony Orchestra Open the Symphonic Masters Series at Lincoln Center

Victoria Martino

November 12, 2012

Lincoln Center's acclaimed Great Performers series began its 2012/13 Symphonic Masters lineup with two outstanding performances by the London Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of its principal conductor, Valery Gergiev. Each of the all-Brahms programs featured a concerto and a symphony by the composer.

The first concert took the audience on a transformative journey from dramatic darkness into radiant light, beginning with the Tragic Overture, continuing with the Violin Concerto, and ending with the sunny Second Symphony. Conceived by the composer as the pendant to his rousing Academic Festival Overture, the Tragic Overture has a powerful, brooding energy, and it was the perfect opener for the evening's program. Gergiev was in his element, sculpting sound with sensitive, expressive gestures that could convey his intentions to the responsive orchestra merely with the fingers of his left hand.



The orchestra was joined by James Ehnes for Brahms' magnificent violin concerto, which stands alongside that of Beethoven at the musical summit of the instrument's repertoire. Symphonic in scope and substance, the concerto nevertheless presents the soloist with ample opportunities for the display of technical brilliance, thanks to the compositional interventions of Brahms' close friend and dedicatee Joseph Joachim, the greatest violin virtuoso of his day. Ehnes proved himself equal to the task of rendering the fiendishly difficult passages flawless and impeccable; yet, he seemed incapable of making music with the orchestra. His playing had a tenseness and breathlessness that made it scarcely possible for Gergiev to keep the ensemble together. The unfortunate fact that there had only been one afternoon rehearsal of soloist and orchestra immediately prior to the concert was regrettably evident in the performance. The members of the orchestra played each phrase with deep conviction and profound musicality, yet Ehnes remained impassive, seemingly unaware of the inspired musical ideas with which

he was meant to be in dialogue. This was especially apparent in the slow movement, in which the solo oboe states the theme, and continues to dominate throughout. Guest principal oboist Emanuel Abbuehl invoked tears with his plaintive, soulful melody, but found no echo in the responses of the solo violin. Like many of his contemporaries, Ehnes frequently indulged in swooping portamenti, ostensibly in an effort to play expressively and romantically, but these ill-advised mannerisms were unconvincing, and no substitute for true musicality. They only served to disrupt an otherwise clean performance.

Following the intermission, Gergiev returned to the podium to conduct Brahms' majestic Second Symphony. This work not only shares tonality with the violin concerto (D major), but was also composed during a summer sojourn on the Woerthersee in the Austrian province of Carinthia. Brahms was always at his most inspired and bucolic during these summer periods of refreshment and rejuvenation, and both the violin concerto and the second symphony carry within them the traces of his contentment, while nevertheless retaining a certain inherent melancholy characteristic of the composer.

Written a summer before the violin concerto, the Second Symphony is densely packed with musical ideas and melodies. In fact, Brahms wrote to a friend that summer that "the melodies fly so fast and thick that one must be careful not to step on them." Under Gergiev's inspired direction, the London Symphony Orchestra filled the hall with expansive, sumptuous sound and spine-tingling rhythmic precision, ranging from lush, rich, full resonances to crisp staccato winds and string pizzicati. Gergiev masterfully brought out every nuance of the composition's complex rhythmic structures, allowing the phrases to speak with declamatory clarity. His interpretation brought out the work's monumentality and majesty, and one was led inevitably to think of Mahler, who undoubtedly owed a great debt to the Brahms symphonies in the creation of his own.

One of Gergiev's greatest attributes is his element of surprise. Neither he nor his audience can ever settle into complacency, but must hear each note (or rest) as if for the very first time. A particularly effective example was in the pregnant pause between the trio of the third movement and the da capo of the scherzo — one could have heard a pin drop in the hall, such was the palpability of the silence. Then, following the reprise of the scherzo, Gergiev plunged into the finale without a second of hesitation, leading one to experience in full the musical concept of "attacca." With the triumphant flourishes of the coda, the symphony came to a close and the ensuing thunderous applause nearly brought the house down. As the audience left the hall, many were heard to remark that this performance of the Second Symphony was the finest in memory.

The second Brahms program by Gergiev and the London Symphony Orchestra was at once more challenging and more satisfying. The choice of repertoire was less popularly appealing, more demanding, and much darker in palette. The choice of soloist — Russian pianist Denis Matsuev — in the titanic first piano concerto was much more felicitous, insofar as there was a greater sense of coherence and unity of interpretation between solo and orchestra than had been the case with the violin concerto.

Matsuev, who is fondly known as the "Siberian bear," is a man of enormous stature and strength. Watching him attack the keys with his huge hands, one could not help but think of Brahms himself, who was known to be a powerful pianist, also due to the size of his hands. The D minor concerto was the

perfect vehicle for Matsuev, as he was able effortlessly to convey the sense of commanding authority called for by the work, while at the same time melding in complete synchrony with Gergiev and the orchestra. Indeed, one could not help but think of the performance as a kind of “family affair,” so attuned was the soloist to the maestro’s every gesture. Both Matsuev and Gergiev took a slow and heavy approach to the first movement, effectively bringing out its dark timbre and ponderous sense of foreboding and drama. Both could freely indulge in mercurial mood changes and huge contrasts of dynamics, from exquisite pianissimi to thunderous fortissimi, without needing to be concerned about balance. In Brahms’ own cadenza for the first movement, Matsuev almost seemed to be channeling the composer himself, masterfully creating the illusion of an extemporaneous, spontaneous dialogue between left and right hands. The colors that he achieved in the long, slowly descending chromatic line leading to the coda were truly extraordinary.

Reflective and thoughtful in the second movement, Matsuev meandered through the phrases in an almost fragmentary way, occasionally floating with bell-like sonorities above the ostinato of celli and basses. His musings gave way to a fiery and tempestuous finale, which bore all the hallmarks of a virtuoso tour de force, yet never lost its playful quality. A particularly endearing moment was Matsuev’s expression of almost childlike delight in the fugato variation of the rondo; unlike Ehnes in the violin concerto, he seemed to be completely invested in the musical substance of the work.

Received by a standing ovation and shouts of “Bravo,” Matsuev could not resist performing an encore: Rachmaninoff’s pensive, lyrical Prelude in E flat major, Op. 23, No. 6. It was somewhat of a shock to hear Rachmaninoff in the midst of an all-Brahms program, but Matsuev has come to be universally recognized as a Rachmaninoff specialist (having even made a recording, “Unknown Rachmaninoff,” on the composer’s own piano), and he played the flowing prelude with such expressive musicality that one was happy to hear it.

The final work on the evening’s program was Brahms’ monumental and noble Fourth Symphony, the composer’s final and ultimate statement in the symphonic vein. Gergiev brought out the piece’s grandeur and gravity, giving the same careful attention to delicate, poignant passages as to arching, architectural phrases. The driving dotted rhythms of the first movement positively crackled under the baton of the conductor, and one felt swept along by the compelling, inexorable sequence of musical ideas.

Gergiev was at his most sensitive (“innig,” to use Brahms’ language) in the slow second movement. He carefully laid a carpet of sound with the pizzicati of the strings, on top of which the choir of winds expressed the plaintive theme. Despite the huge size of the orchestra, this movement sounded like chamber music, with extraordinary dynamic control and range, from almost inaudible pianissimi to vibrant fortissimi, the melodies being passed from winds to strings and back again. Gergiev allowed the music to breathe organically, with rubati that came naturally out of the phrases themselves. Wielding the baton like a sorcerer, his incantations brought life to the score.

The ebullience of the unusual duple meter scherzo was followed without pause (*attacca*) by the finale, a Baroque chaconne in form. Gergiev masterfully maintained the dramatic tension, building from the

statement of the tragic theme in the lower register of the strings, through the reiteration of dotted rhythms (recalling the first movement), and on into the subsequent variations. Most notable, perhaps, was the poignant dialogue of the solo flute with the clarinet and oboe. Gergiev's expansive, architectonic interpretation of the finale inevitably brought to mind the movement's ultimate prototype: the Bach Chaconne from the second partita for solo violin. Brahms surely would have been completely gratified by the performance, as it revealed his extraordinary achievement of casting an ancient form in a new and innovative harmonic guise.

With this triumphant two-program offering of Brahms, Gergiev and the London Symphony Orchestra set an extremely high standard for the 2012/2013 Symphonic Masters series, and theirs will be a difficult act to follow.

http://newyorkarts.net/2012/11/12/gergiev-lso-brahms-symphonic-masters/#.UKa3rW_7K8A

LIMELIGHT

TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphonies No 1–3 (LSO/Valery Gergiev)

Greg Keane

November 14, 2012

Russian roulette pays off – Gergiev gambles with his countryman’s lesser-known symphonies



As regular readers will know, I’ve often been unimpressed by Gergiev’s sadly variable LSO Mahler cycle, where he often had even less to say about the music than Ashkenazy. I’m happy to say I was entranced by this 2-CD set from beginning to end. For once, the cliché “unjustly neglected” is totally accurate in describing the shameful overlooking of these three genuine masterpieces. The First and Third have long been my favourite Tchaikovsky symphonies; until now my preferred version of No 1

was the youthful Michael Tilson Thomas with his Boston forces, and in the Third either Bernstein’s 1960s New York Philharmonic or Karajan’s 1980s Berlin Phil.

Gergiev’s First, *Winter Daydreams*, is simply gorgeous. The combination of panache, finesse and imagination in the first movement is wonderful: you can almost feel the chill on the rosy cheeks of Romanov aristocrats with exquisite noses and perfect cheekbones, as they travel through the wondrous winter landscape, swathed in sable in a troika. The tender phrasing of the second subject is worth the price of the set alone.

The second movement is a wistful reverie and the scherzo is jewel-like. I’ve often regarded the Second Symphony, the so-called *Little Russian*, aka Ukraine, as not of the same level of inspiration as its neighbours, especially the last movement, which has always seemed to be over-stretched. But in this performance, my prejudices were quickly banished. The “slow” movement in particular radiates a beguiling *suaveté*.

The Third Symphony, *Polish*, is Tchaikovsky’s least played. Its five-movement, suite-like structure has a vaguely symmetrical effect, rather in the style of Bartók’s Concerto for Orchestra or Goldmark’s *Rustic Wedding Symphony* (to which it’s vastly superior). The two scherzi surround a slow movement, the emotional core of the work, with a coda that must surely have been inspired by the more introspective passages in Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*. Gergiev handles this passage quite hauntingly.

In the second scherzo, he keeps the strings muted and achieves a similar effect to the trio of the lopsided waltz in the emotionally bleak *Pathétique*. In the finale, which gives the symphony its name, Gergiev strikes the right tempo and we enter a world of Romanov glamour and grandeur. This is a set where everything seems to go right in terms of sound, interpretation and playing. I'll be very surprised if it's not on my list of 2012 favourites.

<http://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/Review/322853,tchaikovsky-symphonies-no-182113-Isovalery-gergiev.aspx>

Maestro Gergiev sells Russia's Olympics to the world

Jennifer Cibbon

November 14, 2012



Maestro Valery Gergiev is Russia's greatest living cultural czar and, fittingly, a key ambassador for the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics.

Famous for his inexhaustible work ethic and charisma, the 60-year-old conductor somehow manages to juggle full-time jobs as principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra and head of the Mariinsky Ballet and Opera Company in St. Petersburg.

Sought by orchestras worldwide because of the passion he pours into conducting, he is also known for his unshakeable loyalty to the country that nurtured him.

Because of this, Russian officials made him one of the faces of the upcoming Sochi Olympics, which begin just over a year from now. Gergiev has become a roving ambassador with the open assignment of talking up Russia and its bright future during the second term in power of President Vladimir Putin.

Gergiev was in Toronto recently for a performance of the Mariinsky Theatre Stradivarius Ensemble and he spoke with CBC News producer Jennifer Cibbon about a resurgent Russia, a country that refuses to measure itself by how the West views its internal politics.

(The interview has been edited for length and clarity.)

What does it mean to be 'an ambassador' for the Sochi Olympics?

Gergiev: Six years ago, my role was to help Sochi win the 2014 Olympics. I myself am from the Caucasus and went to Sochi many times as a student. My role was to bring international attention to the fact that Russia is transforming itself in big international forums — in sports, arts, culture and films.

This will be a big period of building. The facilities are not only for professional athletes and events, but for the people, for normal Russians.

My role is to articulate the interests of the people, for example, deciding where young musicians will perform before and after the Olympics.

You don't build these huge facilities for just a few weeks, you should build them for 40 or 50 years. You have to think of people, not only of one particular event.



Sochi was an interesting choice for the Olympics. Isn't it risky, because it sits on the edge of a very troubled region, the Caucasus, and is only a few hundred kilometres from war-torn Chechnya?

Russian President Vladimir Putin, left, and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev meet at the mountain resort of Krasnaya Polyana, near Sochi in southern Russia in March 2012. (Dmitry Astakhov/Associated Press)

There has never been trouble in Sochi. I think that in the Caucasus, things are changing. It was very difficult 20 years ago, but it's more stable now in Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.

The region has good relations with Turkey, Europe and with China and the United States. And Sochi is well-positioned because it is so close to the sea and to the mountains. People will enjoy such natural beauty.

Many in the West are critical of the Putin regime, though he is very popular within Russia. What do you think his regime brings to the 'new Russia?'

What is the Putin regime? What is the Obama regime? Many people are critical of Obama, and very many people were very critical of George Bush. But a chosen president has to do his work.

Twelve years ago, the situation in Russia was difficult. But it was not up to the West, but to Russians to make things work.

The Russian economy is moderately healthy now, and some think it is healthier than the general European economy. We never achieved that before. Never.

People in Russia always worry what others say. China doesn't worry at all what others say. They just do what they think is good for the country.

We have to continue to learn how to make Russia the country that everyone wants it to be.

There were big hopes in the early '90s and in the last years of the Soviet Union. Expectations for freedom and democracy were big. But people didn't understand that immediate freedom can also bring a lot of trouble.

We spoke before about the Caucasus being dangerous. During Soviet times, this was one of the safest regions on Earth. We didn't know crime. That was only 25 or 30 years ago.

You're a global citizen. You could live anywhere. But you have worked tirelessly over the past quarter of a century to protect and strengthen the Mariinsky, one of Russia's key cultural institutions. How do you feel when people in the West write off Russia because of all its problems?

First of all, the West doesn't understand Russia. I don't blame you. It's 10 hours away from Canada or the U.S.

Russia is a great country with a great culture and great cultural institutions. I am lucky that I can enjoy both worlds. I believe in the country. Period. Russia can live as it wants. Its history allows it to do it.

The world benefits strongly from Russian cultural riches. Russia doesn't need any defence or protection from me. There should not be a love affair between Russia and other countries, it's not needed. It's the biggest country on Earth.

You mean that Russia is still a great power...

We don't think that way anymore. We don't think this because we have more tanks. Yes, we have nuclear weapons. Is that why we are great? Not necessarily, not only.

But culturally it is, traditionally, a very special country.

There are so many factors. It's got nothing to do with one man: Mr. Putin. It has absolutely nothing to do with one man. Things happen independently of government, of the Kremlin or any mayor or governor.

What the government should do, and hopefully will do, is to improve the standard of living in Russia, especially outside Moscow.

Moscow is a very rich city. It is so rich that it has become annoying to see all the demonstrations of this wealth. It would be much better to spend this vast wealth on education or health systems and artistic and musical presence in the lives of many Russians.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2012/11/12/f-valery-gergiev.html>

More foreign shows enter China

November 15, 2012

Nearly half of the productions at the [Shanghai](#) International [Arts](#) Festival that wraps up on November 20th are either foreign productions or co-productions between local theaters and international performers.

More than 200 foreign shows are now performed in Shanghai every year, and audience members say the performance quality is much improved in recent years. Performances during this year's festival have included the Salzburg Festival's modern version of the opera *La Bohème*, and concerts by the Mariinsky Theater Orchestra and the San Francisco Symphony. One International artist's agent says with more and more international shows playing here, the Chinese market is no longer buying based only on overseas reputation.

Performance agent Paul Tanguay said, "I prepare tours to come to China. It's been difficult for us because it's not easy to tour here, for different reasons - technical, money or whatever. I'm here, I'm persistent."

A local cultural company manager says the policy on bringing in foreign shows has eased in recent years. Before 2006, no more than one out of five stage shows in Shanghai could be foreign, and regulators could veto things they didn't like. But now he says everything is based on market demand. And while it takes less than three weeks to get approval to stage international shows here, cost remains the biggest factor.

Fang Yongnian, deputy GM of E.S.H. International Cultural Exchange Co., said, "Sometimes we reject some foreign shows just because they are too expensive. For example, if we invite a European symphony orchestra, we have to pay the transportation and accommodation for more than 100 people. It's more than 1.5 million yuan. And that also brings an increase in ticket prices."

Fang suggests that overseas agents could help develop the Chinese market and also pick up part of the tour costs here. And another industry insider notes that the cost can affect the content.

Ke Chaoping, president of China Eastern Theaters Union, said, "It costs a lot for us to bring in a foreign show, so we need to be sponsored. Some sponsors just ask us to stage performances that the spectators are familiar with. Maybe it's not bad in the current market. It's helpful to raise local audiences' ability to appreciate foreign shows."

Reporter: "More than 50 performing arts venues have been built around China in the past three years. Here in Shanghai, more than 10 theaters were built or renovated after the 2010 World Expo, including the Culture Square and Mercedes-Benz Arena. Next year, the Shanghai Grand Theater will undergo refurbishment to accommodate more shows."

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/life/2012-11/15/content_15933494.htm



London Symphony Orchestra

B.A. Nilsson

November 15, 2012

Conductor Valery Gergiev is not a bar-shaper who smooths each moment of music that emerges from under his baton. In the context of so many who pursue an interpretive identity through fussiness, Gergiev's performances can seem arch, even angry. For his performances of Richard Strauss's unusually violent opera *Elektra*, presented two years ago at London's Barbican Center, Gergiev powered orchestra and singers through a reading surprisingly more tame than, say, his Prokofiev operas.



Strauss' score, a shocker for pre-Stravinsky 1909, is as complex and dissonant as the composer ever would get, wherein even the sounds of the words themselves are as score-woven as the pitches. The classic myth of mother-love and betrayal is a nonstop, white-knuckle whitewater race (rudely interrupted by a fade-out, fade-in CD change), and Gergiev and his forces persuasively traverse the arcs of it, even with some unexpected restraint.

Soprano Jeanne-Michèle Charbonnet brings a big presence to the title role, her voice settling into the demands after a wobbly climax to her long entrance number ("Allein!"). She needs a little of the assurance of mezzo Felicity Palmer, whose reputation as a terrifying Klytemnestra is again affirmed. And she's effectively

contrasted by bass Matthias Goerne, whose Orest loses none of its power even in the affecting reunion scene he sings with Elektra, his sister.

The economics of recordings pretty much demands in-concert recordings of operas these days, which anyway benefit from the excitement of having an audience at hand. Armed with audio from multiple performances and a rehearsal or two, an optimal compilation can be realized—if the sessions are recorded well. The engineers did excellent work miking the nuances of the piece, so that orchestral intricacies lost even in some of the older studio versions shine through. If there's sometimes too much competition between voice and orchestra, well, I find it adds to the excitement. Nobody ever gets badly swamped.

The classic cut-your-teeth-on-it version for me featured Birgit Nilsson (no relation) with George Solti conducting, and it stands the time test. A more recent, better-sounding set with Deborah Polaski in the title role alongside Palmer, conducted by Semyon Bychkov, offers audiophile competition, but Gergiev's serves the score itself best of all, and deserves your attention at least for that.

<http://metroland.net/2012/11/15/london-symphony-orchestra/>

The New York Times

Seamless Mesh of Musicians Furnish Unified Sound

James R. Oestreich

November 15, 2012



There is no more reliable brand in the symphonic trade than the [Cleveland Orchestra](#). You may not always know what to expect in the interpretation, but you know that you will get complete concentration and hair-trigger responsiveness in the execution, which translate into near-flawless playing and togetherness.

It was remarkable, at Carnegie Hall on Tuesday evening, to see even veteran musicians consistently leaning in to watch and listen to one another, to mesh with one another, in so standard a work as Beethoven's Fourth Symphony. There was nothing routine about the performance or about [Franz Welser-Möst's](#) conducting of it.

Let one fine point in the playing stand for many: the suspenseful pianissimo timpani roll before the first movement recapitulation, played absolutely evenly by Paul Yancich at the very edge of audibility.

The work's finale is marked *Allegro ma non troppo*, "not too much so" being, of course, a relative concept. Mr. Welser-Möst flirted with danger, but the skittering precision of the strings made his tempo seem just right — for this orchestra.

The symphony opened the program, and Beethoven's "Grosse Fuge," the discarded string-quartet movement with a life of its own, opened the second half in Mr. Welser-Möst's own arrangement for string orchestra. It is hard for massed strings to negotiate the angular fugue theme cleanly (and impossible for them to retain the austerity of the original), and Mr. Welser-Möst seemed to be making a point by using the orchestra's full string complement. However much that choice may have further rounded the corners of the fugue theme, it paid dividends in the mellower central section, which may never have sounded warmer.

But for one listener, at least, the highlight of the concert was the New York premiere of [Matthias Pintscher's](#) "Chute d'Étoiles" ("Falling Stars"), which sounded utterly transformed in relation to a previous partial hearing. The work pays tribute to the artist Anselm Kiefer and is named for [a 2007 installation](#) he created in Paris.

Mr. Pintscher tries to evoke what he calls "the 'sound' of lead," the lead in Mr. Kiefer's sculptures, going heavy on the brasses (including two trumpeters with extended concertolike solos) and percussion. Even the strings achieved a metallic sound at times.

Though the work runs uninterrupted for 20 minutes, it was written in two parts, which have a complicated performance history. I heard Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra present the [American premiere of Part 1](#) in Chapel Hill, N.C., last month as part of Carolina Performing Arts' season-long celebration "['The Rite of Spring' at 100](#)," and the clangor, in a dry 1,400-seat hall, was overpowering.

Here, in a hall twice the size and given the Cleveland Orchestra's ability to maintain a cultured sound even in full cry, the piece was eminently listenable. In addition, presented complete, it made for a pleasing, symmetric whole rather than tailing off at 10 minutes with diminishing energy.

Michael Sachs and Jack Sutte were brilliant trumpeters, both when they were allowed to wail and when they were reduced to pitchless puffs of breath, tongued percussively.

The program ended with Scriabin's "Poem of Ecstasy": even in a performance this fine, a piece as full of bluster as it is of color.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/16/arts/music/seamless-mesh-of-musicians-furnish-unified-sound.html>



Long-awaited "Russian Seasons" again in Minsk

November 16, 2012

This time the stars of the Mariinsky Theatre and the "Kremlin Ballet" will present the plays "Cleopatra - Ida Rubinstein" with Ilze Liepa in the lead role.

The "Russian Seasons" project has been presented in Minsk several times. Some performances of the Diaghilev theatrical enterprise were staged in Minsk with the Belarusian ballet dancers by the "Russian Seasons" successor Andris Liepa.

The ballet performances "Cleopatra - Ida Rubinstein" and "Les Sylphides" will take place tomorrow at the Bolshoi Theatre of the Republic of Belarus.

<http://www.tvr.by/eng/culture.asp?id=78161>