



Posted on Fri, Nov. 20, 2009

Review | Piano concerto premiere a sure bet

By TIMOTHY MCDONALD
The Kansas City Star

World premieres are always a little risky: untested repertory with uncertain effect. Friday night's concert by the Kansas City Symphony featured just such a toss of the dice, and everyone left a winner.

The orchestra commissioned Avner Dorman's "Lost Souls, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra," with pianist Alon Goldstein in mind. Before the performance Dorman described the narrative behind the music: a séance calling forth composers and pianists of the past; a recital that turns demonic and an ultimate exorcism.

Opening with eerie and dissonant high-string swoops, the work began without Goldstein at the keyboard. A silly and over-theatrical moment followed when the stage lights dimmed to black. The lights returned, and miracle of miracles — Goldstein was at the piano (as if the audience didn't know what to expect!)

Despite the inane theatrics, the music was marvelous, featuring sprinkles of dissonance among ever present tonal riffs and passages. The rhythms were so intense that one percussionist overturned his bongos near the beginning of the work.

Evocations of the styles of Chopin, Bach, Gershwin, Ligeti and others could be heard throughout the work. Dorman employed a clever technique of beginning a melody in the piano and continuing it in the strings in an abnormally high register.

While the central portion of the composition flagged in energy and interest, the conclusion was a musical roller coaster ride.

Goldstein played convincingly, with a dual musical personality: vibrant lyricism at times followed by highly technical musical athleticism. The work ended with an extended piano trill, high strings, crashing percussion and (more theatrics!) lights out.

The orchestra proved a highly skilled partner for Goldstein, impressive in its precision and orchestral colors.

A thrilling performance of Sibelius' "Symphony No. 2 in D Major" followed. From the cheerful opening with its beautiful, rich and blended string sound to the majestic finale, the orchestra imbued the work with opulent romanticism. Principal oboist Mingjia Liu was notable for his wonderful solo lines.

Bartók's "Hungarian Sketches" was only moderately successful. Pizzicato strings were not

together in the opening movement and occasional lapses in intonation plagued the fourth movement.

The program will be repeated at 8 p.m. Saturday at the Lyric Theatre and at 2 p.m. Sunday at Yardley Hall.

© 2009 Kansas City Star and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.kansascity.com>