

## **SYMPHONY REVIEW**

### **Kahane Works Wonders**

**Aug. 11, 2001**

**By Thomas Goss**

In the vast symphonic network that is our Bay Area's "Freeway Philharmonic," one orchestra is held in special regard by those freelancers whose job it is to play in several of them — the Santa Rosa Symphony. As its "Festival on the Green" showed on Saturday, this is more than a community orchestra. It's an opportunity for some of the area's top players to form their own community of excellence and musical synergy.

The credit is attributable to Jeffrey Kahane and his work over the past decade building the level of ensemble and of the audience as well. The Santa Rosa Symphony is fortunate to have a following that is more than just a "posteriority," an informed and engaged public that shares the mission as well as the excitement, and gives back to the ensemble more than applause.

Kahane's musical personality transcends the simply likable. In this all-Tchaikovsky performance, he presented an approach to Romanticism that, by being unadorned, made the emotional contours of the music the more clearly defined. While Kahane's conducting showed an awareness to European traditions of interpretation, his unsentimental sincerity was most effective in bringing forth a complex, less mawkish Fourth Symphony.

#### **A Quieter, Gentler Tchaikovsky**

This old warhorse felt more coltish in the open air of the summer evening, lakeside on the grounds of Sonoma State University. In the quiet, moist breeze, Tchaikovsky had to stand up a little and get less lost in himself. While Fate knocked and all of that, here it was only a decisive theme and not an overblown gasp of a great, tortured soul.

The simple, direct reading of the Andantino felt all the more "Russian," while the *moto perpetuo pizzicato* in the succeeding movement came off more sweet than clever, like an adorable cookie thief. The Finale felt more symphonic than balletic as Kahane avoided the well-worn tendency to plow through it as if it were a lost scrap of *Sleeping Beauty*. It was nice to be able to laugh along with the composer at his sly contrasts of texture, at his crazy chromatic descents.

#### **Mining the Meaning in the Music**

Violinist Nurit Pacht was the visiting virtuoso in Tchaikovsky's D Major Violin Concerto, composed concurrently with the Fourth Symphony. Pacht was

sensitive and engaging from the first note. Her style combined remarkable evenness of tone and empathy with a dramatic, somewhat Terpsichorean approach to phrasing. This dance quality paid off wonderfully in the exploration of the second subject of the first movement, that tricky moment when it is all too easy to mince. At the same time, Pacht's pacing and dynamic punctuation wore toe shoes.

A radiance in her tone and emotional indulgence bore strong evidence of the Israeli tradition. On the other hand, Pacht's musical intelligence gave her playing an entirely individual character, whether in the collective tumult of the first cadenza, the selfless lamentations of the canzonetta, or the artless ebullience of the finale. At last, here is a young hotshot capable of getting past all of those notes at the end and, no matter how fast the composer is requiring her to play, simply showing us the meaning.