

February 24, 6 pm New Mexico Philharmonic Concert Review
by D. S. Crafts
for the Journal

Saturday's New Mexico Philharmonic concert featured Eastern European, mostly Russian works written within 50 years of each other. Music Director Robert Minczuk[cq] welcomed guest soloist Karen Gomyo[cq] to the Popejoy stage for Prokofiev's first Violin Concerto.

Gomyo comes to Albuquerque after a slew of performances with distinguished orchestras behind her, as well as appearing in a Japanese documentary about Stradivarius in which she is both violinist and host. She plays the "Aurora, ex-Foulis" Stradivarius violin of 1703.

If anyone could ever be accused of conjuring wit in music, it is Prokofiev--always on the edge of bliss and despair, grace and aggression, divine yet diabolical too. The first violin concerto abounds with novel, often ingenious musical devices, unexpected, unanticipated but always most welcome--even a few shrill moments that were stolen for the shower scene in Hitchcock's Psycho.

From the outset Gomyo's approach to the Prokofiev concerto projected lyricism above all. She and Minczuk were clearly of a mind in this. No wild sense of abandon as much of the work lends itself to, but rather an immaculate, premeditated, polished performance with not a hair out of place. Allowing for virtuosity, the melodic design of the work predominated. Minczuk meticulously kept the orchestra in check never once overpowering the often delicate solo sonority of the violin.

The Russian word "skazka" translates as fairy-tale and this perfectly captures the musical story of the concerto with its fantastical characters and continual twists of plot ending in a transcendental reverie with harmonies seemingly evaporating into the disperse molecules of the perfumed atmosphere. An exquisite performance in all respects.

Gomyo returned to the stage after several curtain calls to perform Piazzolla's Tango Etude No. 4 as an encore.

Minczuk returned for the all-Tchaikovsky second half, beginning with a superb reading of the Overture-Fantasy Romeo and Juliet, a musical depiction of the play by the great author known as "Shake-speare." Wind players must have a special place in their hearts for Tchaikovsky for the beautiful melodies he invariably gives them. Indeed the precious love-theme (outdone only by Prokofiev's later version) is given entirely to the winds.

The evening concluded with a bang, or many bangs, and quite literally. The requisite cannons of the 1812 overture are often simulated electronically, but here it was the audience who provided the sound effects. Each audience member was given three

luminaria bags which were to be blown up and popped at Minczuk's direction. I must admit to being more than a bit skeptical, but, credit where credit is due, this idea worked magnificently. Truly one could believe there was a trio of cannons emanating from the Popejoy audience. Bravo to whoever was responsible for the idea.

The concert opened with Vltava by Smetana, better known by the river's German name, The Moldau.