

A Romantic Fantasy at the Oakville Symphony!

Review by *David Richards*
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Pianist Sae Yoon Chon, Maestro Roberto De Clara and the Oakville Symphony Orchestra

The Oakville Symphony hit all the right buttons for this past weekend's concerts that Artistic Director **Roberto De Clara** coined as *Romantic Fantasy!* The program ranged from late Beethoven to Mahler and spanned Russian, German, French and Italian music. It included art song, opera, ballet and a stunning piano concerto with virtuosic soloists sharing the stage. What could be more Romantic than the story of Romeo and Juliet? Three of the selections referenced the famous Shakespearian love story.

The Oakville Symphony is not your regular community orchestra. With hand-picked professionals in the principal and leading roles, along with brilliant students in its young artist program, De Clara has developed a finely tuned ensemble that can make great music sound magnificent. There is an old radio ad that can be modified slightly for this orchestra, "It's worth the drive to Oakville!"

The program began with Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, op. 58* with South Korean pianist **Sae Yoon Chon**. Chon, a student in the Artist Diploma Program of the Glenn Gould

School at the Royal Conservatory and the prize winner of several international competitions. In just the past two weeks, he has performed two piano concertos with two orchestras as well as two solo concerts in Italy. Next month he will travel to Seoul, Korea for the Soeul International Piano Competition.

The piano's opening phrase of the concerto yesterday was spellbinding. The sensitivity to the dynamics and Chon's control of the keys with the softest chords surprised and gripped the audience who may have been waiting for the usual orchestral introduction. Beethoven had left the mould of the classical concerto behind and was forging the path into the romanticism that would envelop the 19th century.

Chon's scales, arpeggios and trills flew over the keyboard with effortless precision. While his cadenza was brilliantly played, it was in his lyrical moments that held me most captive. He and Maestro De Clara were clearly on the same page. He interacted with the orchestra like he was in a chamber music ensemble. His phrase endings melted into the orchestra's next phrase. I was especially impressed with the strings in the second movement. The contrasts between orchestra and piano gave rise to all sorts of images –the music was riveting!

In the second half of the program, mezzo-soprano **Stephanie Yelovich** joined the orchestra to perform three selections beginning with Gustav Mahler's moving art song, *Ich bin der Welt Abhenden Gekommen*. I returned to the Sunday concert to hear this magnificent music performed so exceedingly well a second time. She embodied the poetry expressing the sentiment that the artist is dead to the world and lives alone in her heaven, her song. The opening with English horn, bassoons and harp perfectly set the mood of gloom that hung over the music in the most personal way.



Mezzo-soprano Stephani Yelovich, Maestro Roberto De Clara and the Oakville Symphony Orchestra

Yelovich returned later with an aria from Massenet's opera, *Werther*, "Va! Laisse couler mes larmes", another emotional outpouring of the spirit of one who has lost the love of her life and cannot be consoled. She was completely convincing in this beautiful aria. The orchestra with oboe and saxophone solos, added contrasting colour.

In her final selection, an aria from Bellini's *I Capuletti e I Montecchi*, "Se Romeno t'uccise un figlio", Yelovich displayed her bel canto singing with exquisite sweeping tender phrases followed by a contrasting section with heated emotion. Yelovich demonstrated both the voice and technique to handle the virtuosic demands. Yelovich is well-versed in opera and oratorio having performed in both genres. Her sumptuous voice in every register has the power and intensity of emotion to project in the romantic repertoire. She has set herself on track for a career that should put her artistry in front of a wide audience. I look forward to hearing more of her.

The orchestra was on full display in two versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, Sergei Prokofiev's "Dance of the knights" from his ballet and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture*. The biting sound of the strings in the Prokofiev and the lush orchestral melodies of the Tchaikovsky with brass and percussion coming to the fore made for exciting orchestral sounds. I don't know how anyone could have gone home without singing Tchaikovsky's famous 'love theme'. I would like to point out the poignantly beautiful wind choir of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons and horns who played superbly together in the Tchaikovsky.

The next **Oakville Symphony Orchestra** concert on **April 4th** and **5th 2020** is entitled **Russian Fantasy** and will feature violinist **Véronique Matthieu**.