

SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY REVIEW

French pianist Collard an old hand in new digs

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As a sequel to Halloween, the Santa Rosa Symphony and Music Director Bruno Ferrandis whisked listeners off on an eerie odyssey Saturday night with a haunting performance of Berlioz's "Symphonie fantastique."

The work's colorful orchestration — replete with bombastic brass, pounding percussion, squeaky clarinets and other unusual timbres — marked the birth of the modern symphony when it was written way back in 1830.

Ferrandis programmed the virtuosic piece to test his players in the orchestra's new home, the warm, wood-lined Weill Hall at the Green Music Center. They passed with flying colors, thanks to the conductor's steady beat and the orchestra's tight ensemble.

Underscoring the Romantic theme of the evening, French pianist Jean-Philippe Collard gave an alluring performance of Saint-Saens' Piano Concerto No. 2 before intermission.

The 64-year-old pianist last performed with the Santa Rosa Symphony more than 30 years ago, and some piano aficionados may remember his 2001 recital at the Santa Rosa Junior College.

Most soloists who perform with the symphony tend to be young, rising stars rather than well-seasoned veterans. So it's a treat to listen to Collard, who still has all physical technique required to pull off the endless scales, arpeggios, octaves and chords required in this virtuosic work.

When you marry that power with an elegant touch and an emotional affinity for the Romantic repertoire, you get what amounts to a perfect pairing.

Throughout the work, Collard played with an impassioned rubato, slowing and quickening the tempo while keeping a close eye on Ferrandis' beat.

The orchestra took time to warm up, but the accompaniment hit its groove during the brisk, second movement. And that's a good thing, since the piece accelerates in the Presto, a resounding romp through lots of trills and arpeggios, climaxing with big, splashy chords.

For his gymnastic efforts, the cool-headed Collard elicited an enthusiastic standing ovation.

The concert opened with a quirky work for brass, an American premiere of “De Tiempo y de Metal (Of Time and Metal)” by Argentinian composer Martin Matalon. The work consisted of sounds resembling sheep bleets, whistling teapots, stomach rumblings and the adult voices in the beloved “Peanuts” TV cartoons.

Perhaps this was yet another fantasy: To train a brass section to play quietly and watch the baton. It was a fun experiment, and as the Michelin Guide would say, worth the trip.

The concert will be repeated at 8 tonight at the Green Music Center's Weill Hall.

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