

Young orchestra shines at Soka

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The 16th annual iPalpiti Festival of International Laureates stopped by the Soka Performing Arts Center in Aliso Viejo on Sunday afternoon, allowing the listener the welcome chance to hear a midsummer concert indoors. Set up to nurture the careers of young, award-winning classical musicians, ages 19-32, iPalpiti Artists International finds them around the world, from 20 countries this year, including Azerbaijan and Turkey. The word "ipalpiti," we are told, means "heartbeats" in Italian.

The festival has made its home in Los Angeles these many years, but has recently expanded its offerings into Encinitas, and now Orange County. Led by founder, music director and conductor Eduard

Schmieder, a widely traveled Russian violinist and pedagogue, the festival orchestra of 22 strings offered Sunday an unusual program of slightly out of the way music that amply demonstrated the proficiency and sophistication of the young players.

The challenge is to get these all-star musicians from all over, many of them soloists, to perform as a cohesive ensemble, a team. This was mostly accomplished by Schmieder, who led them with crisp signals more concerned with impulses and phrases than beats. The players never lacked the virtuosity necessary for the difficult program; they produced a splendid and colorful sound; and they readily exclaimed expressive sweeps or points, *con gusto*. If minor differences in tone, tuning and phrasing between the musicians gave evidence of the group's ad hoc nature, these were but slight blemishes in its otherwise polished armor.

C.P.E. Bach's "Hamburg" Sinfonia No. 2 got things off to a vigorous start. This is a slashing and chromatic exercise, filled with asymmetrical shapes and abrupt contrasts. The group played it with rugged abandon. The performance of Anton Webern's early, i.e. tonal, "Langsamer Satz," originally for string quartet, here played by the entire ensemble, showed no ill signs of its supersizing. The piece breathed and bloomed lushly and spoke intimately, the individual parts played *en masse* with seeming ease.

Marc-Olivier Dupin's "Variations sur La Traviata de Verdi" served as a solo vehicle for Romanian violinist Alexandru Tomescu. The idea of the piece is better than its accomplishment, which is poorly scored, lacking in imagination and rather wears out the welcome of the famous arias by repeating them too often. Still, it gave Tomescu, a winner of some 27 international competitions according to the program, enough opportunity to soar and dazzle with pyrotechnics that the audience was well pleased.

Tchaikovsky's "Souvenir de Florence" was the gusty concert closer. (At more than a half hour in length, it's hardly a "souvenir," and its Russian style has little to do with Florence – it was only composed there.) Again, the ensemble was faced with the challenge of performing a work originally meant for chamber ensemble, a sextet, in a large group. With seven violins on the first part, six on the second part, and only four violas and four cellos on two parts each, balances and clarity of texture were not always what they should be. Still, Schmieder whipped things up with propulsive incision and the musicians dug in exuberantly. They were having fun. The virtuosity was quite impressive, as in the ricochet bowing in the scherzo, which was machine-gun snappy.

Schmieder and the orchestra will repeat this program at Walt Disney Concert Hall on Sunday. The festival continues with performances in various Los Angeles venues during the week. A source said that it has not yet been decided whether or not the iPalpiti Festival will return to Orange County next year, but it would be a good thing if it did.

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