

# Philharmonic opens season with tribute, Tchaikovsky

Burt Saidel



The official end of summer is the opening concert of The Dayton Philharmonic. The concert, at a date earlier than most years, relieved the summer-long stilled voice of the Philharmonic.

As a special reward for the audience, Maestro Neal Gittleman brought along the sunny musical voice of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Romantic to the extreme, melodic and engaging, Pyotr was a welcome guest.

The original program was to be all Tchaikovsky. The passing of Maestro Charles Wendelken-Wilson this year prompted an important change. Dayton composer and former principal tubist with the orchestra, Steven Winteregg, offered a piece in memory of Charles. I am certain that Pyotr agreed to remove one of his works in honor of a conductor who had played so much of his opus so well.

Steve's piece was typical of his many fine compositions. It was melodic and full of the riches of orchestral musical magic. Not a dirge, but a lovely tribute to one of our musical icons.

The concert also memorialized another of Dayton's musical giants.

Emma Louise Odum was for many years a violist with the DPO. She served as principal for nearly two decades. A person of infinite charm and quick wit, she would never admit to the length of her tenure or her age. No matter, age never diminished her.

The concert was dedicated to her memory. An empty chair and music stand stood among the violists as a moving tribute to this wonderful artist.

The concert returned to Tchaikovsky with the familiar and beloved *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture. The lovely themes of the overture make us forget that the storied lovers were a pair of lustful teens in full revolt against their parents. Music such as the Tchaikovsky overture keeps us starry-eyed and full of romantic tenderness. There were some issues in the performance but they were overshadowed by the mellifluous music.

The soloist of the evening was a young cellist, Coleman Itzkoff. Coleman - tall, handsome with a shock of blond hair - is hardly the typical 16-year-old. He has already established himself as a rising star. From the very first notes of Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rocooco Theme*, he became an immediate sensation.

The work, a show piece for cello and orchestra, has every conceivable musical appeal. The simple theme, played with visible joy by Itzkoff, led into the variations and the entire pan-

oply of possible cello voices. Each variation, full of personality, was handled with the élan of youth and the moderation of a master musician.

Rather than the customary bravura performance, young Itzkoff shaped each of the sections beautifully. The orchestra responded with the same virtuosity.

After intermission, the audience was treated to the orchestra's typical mastery of great music. Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 2* is called the Ukrainian after its debt to the folk themes of that region. For generations, the symphony was called "Little Russian" which is the nickname for Ukrainian. Forgive

me, Maestro Neal, I prefer the joyous title "Little Russian."

The work begins with a challenging and hauntingly beautiful solo on the French horn. This was an official introduction to our new principal, Robert Johnson. His pure clarion call resounded as the perfect beginning of the delightful symphony and caused an audible sigh from the audience. As a special gift, the movement ended with a repeat of Robert's spectacular solo. Thank you Pyotr and thank you Robert.

The rest of the symphony followed the same pattern of joyous perfection. The delightful march cadences of the second move-

ment led to the remarkable scherzo full of dazzling effects. The final movement, one of my favorites, begins with a big statement and compresses into delightful little themes highlighting all sections of the orchestra. This is repeated with stunning variations through several permutations, only to end with a really big finale.

Next, the orchestra brass under Patrick Reynolds takes the stage with chamber concerts September 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. October welcomes Ludwig van Beethoven, bringing his giant 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony and its beloved "Ode to Joy." It is a rich, full life, isn't it!

## Local artists' exhibit Sept. 20-27

The Dayton Painters and Sculptors, 48 High St., Dayton, will be presenting works by David Smith and Betsie Molinsky opening on Sunday, Sept. 20, 1-5 p.m., Friday, Sept. 25 from 1-5 p.m. and Saturday, Sept. 26 from 1 to 5 p.m. Gallery talks and a watercolor demonstration will be held at 3 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 26. Weekdays Monday through Friday the exhibit will be open 1 to 4 p.m. An artist's reception will be held Sunday, Sept. 27.

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