



## Stephen Waarts, *violinist*

### SAN FRANCISCO CLASSICAL VOICE

#### **Storm and Sunshine in the Redwoods**

*David Bratman | San Francisco Classical Voice | September 25, 2010*

The Redwood Symphony celebrated its 25th anniversary on Saturday, opening its season with a potpourri of pleasing music at Cañada College in Redwood City. Eric Kujawsky, who founded the orchestra and has been its music director for all 25 years, conducted the occasion. Sixteen members of the orchestra have been with it all that time, as well, and got to stand and take a round of applause.

Although it was not mentioned from the podium or in the program notes, Saturday was another anniversary, too: the 104th anniversary of Dmitri Shostakovich's birth. That's perhaps a minor number in the grand scheme of anniversaries, so it was marked with a minor work, his Festive Overture. And altogether festive it was in Redwood Symphony's rough yet cheerful handling, entirely lacking in the grimly overblown "forced rejoicing" that Solomon Volkov's book *Testimony* has taught us to hear in much of Shostakovich's "public" music. There was crisp playing here, especially in the brass — something we'd hear a lot of in this concert.

After that came something completely different. Niccolò Paganini's Violin Concerto No. 2 in B Minor, Op. 7, is a rather dull little work, actually, though it's redeemed by a couple of good melodies, including a duet for the soloist and glockenspiel (thus the work's nickname, "La Campanella"), and the opportunity for the violinist — originally the composer himself, of course — to show off. On this occasion, that fortune fell on a local boy, Stephen Waarts. Just turned 14 two months ago, and looking not a day older, Waarts stunned the audience with his dark, mature tone and his assured and confident approach to the music. He has an artful sense of pitch, which came out particularly gracefully in the glissandos. He wrote his own first-movement cadenza, a good pastiche of the Paganini style. No mindless trick performer, he brought out such beauty in the melodic line as could be found, with a rich sound especially in the double-stops. He wisely played to his strength by choosing another virtuoso piece thick in double-stops for his encore, one of Henryk Wieniawski's Op. 18 caprices.

Considering everything else it had to do in this concert, the orchestra apparently did not concern itself much with rehearsing its backup role in the Paganini. And that was an appropriate allocation of resources, as the spotlight in a virtuoso concerto like this one belongs to the soloist. Youthful though he is, Stephen Waarts fully occupied it.