



Bella Hristova, *violinist*

Jacksonville *REVIEW*

Chef Majkut Serves Up a Winning Feast as Rogue Valley Symphony Opens Its Season

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Five years ago when Martin Majkut took over the reigns as Music Director of the Rogue Valley Symphony, he quickly transformed a moribund little local orchestra into a top notch regional symphony orchestra, offering new pieces of music as well as a fresh outlook and insight into the standard classical repertoire, drawing quality musicians into the orchestra and “A” list soloists to join in its performances, and demonstrating an uncanny knack for assembling compelling and exciting concert programs.

Majkut put together a remarkable program of 3 pieces for this first concert of the season. He began with a contemporary piece, *Oaken Sky*, by 26 year old composer, Chris Rogerson, who is the hot new commodity now in contemporary composers among major American orchestras. His works have been or will be played recently by the Amarillo Symphony, New World Symphony, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, New Jersey Symphony, Spokane Symphony Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, and now the Rogue Valley Symphony. *Oaken Sky* was the perfect piece to open the program, and the new season. At 7 minutes, it was like a delectable appetizer at a fine epicurean restaurant, showing off what the kitchen can do, and whetting the appetite for all that would come after. Rogerson employs the full orchestra: woodwinds, brass, strings, harp, celesta, timpani and a warehouse of various percussion instruments all have significant parts to play, providing opportunities to show off each of the orchestra’s different sections. The piece can best be described as Impressionist Music, setting an atmosphere and conveying mood, rather than presenting a detailed tone-picture. The composer describes the work saying “Imagine it’s night and you are standing under a tree looking at the stars. Some of the light . . . is blurred by the branches . . . I try to create this “blurry” effect . . . in addition to moments of pure clarity.” While providing a nice taste of what the orchestra can do, the piece is light and airy, just as a good appetizer ought to be.

For the second piece, Majkut managed to snare one of the hottest violin soloists on the scene today, Bella Hristova, and to persuade her to join the Symphony in performing one of the most impressive and difficult violin concertos, Prokofiev’s Violin Concerto No. 1. Prokofiev composed the piece during an illicit love affair and poured all of his passion into this composition and especially the solo violin part. Hristova, a young musician with a growing international career, has won multiple competitions, prizes & grants, and has performed extensively as a soloist with orchestras, including with Pinkas Zuckerman at Lincoln Center, with Jaime Laredo at Carnegie Hall, with the Mississippi Symphony, City of London Sinfonia, Orquesta Sinfonica de Venezuela, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, and Canada’s National Arts Center Orchestra. Ms. Hristova was superb playing Prokofiev’s Violin Concerto No. 1 Friday evening, executing fast moving passages and playing at the high range of her instrument flawlessly, while conveying all of the intense passion that Prokofiev had invested in this piece. The orchestra was excellent in playing their parts for this piece too, with violas, clarinet, other woodwinds, and violins all contributing significant and outstanding performances, all producing a moving and memorable recital. So Chef Majkut’s second course of the evening was a tasty and satisfying dish.