

## CONCERT REVIEW

# RSO up to the challenge in energetic program

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Two little-known French works opened the Reading Symphony Orchestra's concert Saturday night in the Sovereign Performing Arts Center, followed by two of Beethoven's best-known and well loved pieces.

Under the baton of RSO music director Andrew Constantine, the RSO musicians were consistently challenged and kept on their toes.

The first piece, Georges Bizet's "Jeux d'Enfants: Petite Suite for Orchestra," consisted of five of 12 pieces originally written for piano and then orchestrated by the composer. Like the children's games of the title, the pieces have an air of innocence, but they require quick fingers and precise control.

The opening "Marche" echoed Bizet's opera "Carmen," with a silver-toned trumpet solo by principal Frank Ferraro Jr. The "Berceuse," just for woodwinds and strings, was gentle and refined; the "Impromptu" brief and lively; the "Duo," featuring concertmaster Christopher Collins Lee and cello principal Douglas McNames, was beautifully played; and

the final "Galop" was fast, slick and very French.

Francis Poulenc's "Concerto Champetre for Harpsichord and Orchestra," in which Berks native Matthew Bengtson was the featured soloist, was a delight.

Written in the late 1920s for the great Wanda Landowska, the piece has much of the droll humor for which Poulenc was famous; at times it sounds like cartoon music, at others like something by P.D.Q. Bach.

Episodic, with changes in mood, this concerto often pairs the harpsichord with various instruments in dialogue. Bengtson, who has appeared often in this area as a pianist, is also an adept harpsichordist; he played with humor and speed, particularly in the final movement.

The Reading Symphony Youth Orchestra Sinfonia joined the RSO for Beethoven's Overture to "Fidelio." With so many musicians onstage, the sound was overwhelming.

The RSO ended the evening with Beethoven's Symphony No. 7, with Constantine pulling a dramatic, energetic performance out of the musicians.

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