



Concertmaster dazzles as soloist in Romantic RSO performance

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The Reading Symphony Orchestra featured their marvelous concertmaster, Christopher Collins Lee, as soloist in a concert that focused on the Romantic style in its various eras and aspects.

Under music director Andrew Constantine, the RSO began with Hector Berlioz's

CONCERT REVIEW Overture, "The Roman Carnival" (1843), which the composer based on themes from his own opera, "Benvenuto Cellini."

I'll be honest; I'm not a huge fan of this piece. However, it is one of Berlioz's most popular pieces (although the opera failed), and the RSO gave the fast "saltarello" sections an energetic reading, and the aria near the beginning was plaintive and charming.

Lee's performance of Edouard Lalo's "Symphonie Espagnole" (1873), written as a concerto for violin and orchestra, was exactly what one would expect from him — beautifully phrased, dramatic and often intimate. He draws you into his world; his playing is never aggressive but rather seductive and subtle.

He and the RSO and Constantine have a special relationship, having worked closely together over time, so the performance of this atmospheric piece was especially

and they went on. Such is the risk of live performance.

The second half of the program was much more substantial than the first, featuring Jean Sibelius' sublime Symphony No. 2 in D Major (1901-1902). With its grand scale and lush, soaring orchestral sound, this music calls forth majestic vistas, like Siberia or the American West.

Constantine and the RSO were at their best in this symphony, with every section at the top of its game.

Like many of Beethoven's works, the Sibelius Second pulls itself into being out of fragments in the opening movement; when it finally bursts forth, it is deeply satisfying, and in this performance there was an almost audible sigh from the audience at that moment.

The carefully constructed, gorgeous second movement, which starts with barely audible basses and cellos playing pizzicato and builds into a big, sonorous, luscious song for the whole orchestra, was beautifully carried out.

Scurrying strings, histrionics and nervous tension gave way to pastoral peace in the third movement, with the woodwinds sounding lovely. The Finale, noble, triumphant and overwhelming in its passion, showed a high level of playing and conducting.

Before the RSO began, the Reading Symphony Youth Orchestra Philharmonia con-

spheric piece was especially rewarding to hear.

At one point during the first movement, Lee had to stop the orchestra because his violin “freaked out” (in his words) due to temperature changes. Unfazed, he fixed the problem

chestra Filarmonica, conducted by Brian Mishler, gave an impressive performance of Camille Saint-Saens’ “Marche Militaire Francaise” from the “Algerian Suite.”

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