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Review: Stephane Deneve sets off Bernstein fireworks at the Bowl

By Rick Schultz

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There are nights at the Hollywood Bowl when the music alone produces fireworks. On Thursday, a large audience for guest conductor Stéphane Denève and the Los Angeles Philharmonic's program of sparkling works by Bernstein, Ravel and Gershwin got the benefit of both musical and actual pyrotechnics.

The curtain-raiser was a rousing account of Bernstein's colorful "Candide" Overture. In the composer's Three Dance Episodes from "On the Town," Denève passionately shaped "The Great Lover," while Donald Green, the Philharmonic's departing principal trumpet, captured Bernstein's quintessential poignancy in "Lonely Town." The concluding "Times Square," with its winning "New York, New York" theme, featured James Rotter's suave saxophone.

Jean-Yves Thibaudet was the soloist in Ravel's Piano Concerto in G, an apt bit of programming, since it was Bernstein's signature piece as a pianist. It was said he knew it so well he could be "roused from a sound sleep" and still give a fine performance.

The same might be said of Thibaudet, who delivered a masterly, wide-awake reading. With sensitive support from Denève and the orchestra, he conveyed the jazzy urbanity of the outer movements and the central Adagio's delicate lyricism.

After intermission, Denève gave a vibrant reading of Gershwin's "An American in Paris," conveying its bluesy sense of a visitor's homesickness and wonder in the City of Light. In Denève's ravishing account of Ravel's "Daphnis and Chloé," Suite No. 2, principal flute, David Buck, who is leaving for the Detroit Symphony at the end of the Bowl season, performed radiantly.

As a few people began to leave, Denève returned with an unexpected encore of the "Candide" Overture, this time set to fireworks and ending with streams of golden glitter exploding over the Bowl's shell.

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