

MUSIC REVIEW

Under clear skies, Tanglewood shifts into higher gear



HILARY SCOTT

Sondra Radvanovsky and Bryn Terfel with the BSO under Bramwell Tovey.

By **Jeremy Eichler** | GLOBE STAFF JULY 13, 2015

LENOX — The picture-perfect July weather argued for summer languor but Tanglewood had other ideas.

After an opening weekend with just a single Boston Symphony Orchestra performance, the festival's second weekend was a shift into higher gear, with three engaging concerts that, in different ways, each staved off that creeping sense of routine which, in other circumstances, can be this festival's Achilles' heel.

Friday's performance did so largely through the sensitive leadership of conductor Stéphane Denève, and through the efforts of a soloist seemingly bent on upending his instrument's reputation. Organist Cameron Carpenter dresses and talks the part of the iconoclast. But if his mohawk and glittering feet seemed to raise a few eyebrows in an initially skeptical Shed audience, the flash and sheer virtuosity of his playing — performing on a digital organ built by Marshall & Ogletree — won over Friday's crowd in a big way. After the formal BSO program concluded, well over a thousand listeners stayed for a solo recital in which Carpenter purveyed thickly layered, kinetically charged renditions of works by Gershwin, Bach, Wagner, and others. Given the crowd's enthusiastic response to this late-night offering, the BSO should definitely explore other ways of using this time slot.

But the evening's real centerpiece was Saint-Saens's popular "Organ Symphony," which, after some initial rough edges, settled into an organically shaped and wonderfully atmospheric account led by Denève. The conductor seemed to lavish extra care on the work's slow movement, drawing out long singing lines and an uncommon warmth of tone from the woodwinds and strings. The finale was rousing, with orchestra and organ conjuring a massive wall of sound. Barber's famed Adagio for Strings opened the concert in a thoughtful pairing with Poulenc's Concerto for Organ, String Orchestra, and Timpani. Carpenter and BSO assistant timpanist Daniel Bauch were capable soloists.

Saturday night brought a return to the podium of Bramwell Tovey, who since his "Porgy and Bess" in 2011 has been a frequent guest at Tanglewood. He presided over an all-Italian evening with one-half apiece devoted to Verdi and Puccini. The Tanglewood Festival Chorus sang well, if with some tentativeness, in Verdi's "Stabat Mater," but the first half in truth belonged to the towering bass-baritone Bryn Terfel. He sang "Ella giammai m'amò," the king's profound and heavy-hearted lament from "Don Carlo," conveying a range of the monarch's inner turmoil (Martha Babcock's solo cello proved an elegantly poignant interlocutor). But Terfel's performance was far more fully inhabited in the first-act Honor Monologue from "Falstaff." This of course is one of his signature roles, and on Saturday night, in this brief excerpt, he owned it once more.

It was all warm-up in a way for what followed: the complete Act I of "Tosca." Tenor Gwyn Hughes Jones had been slated to sing Cavaradossi before visa problems intervened and Brandon Jovanovich stepped in, bringing a bright tenor and ardent vocalism to the role. Sondra Radvanovsky made an excellent Tosca, her deep-toned

and well-handled soprano cutting through the orchestra and ringing out across the Shed. She also enjoyed good dramatic and vocal rapport with Javanovich. Terfel naturally took up Scarpia, another signature role, with sinister aplomb. John Del Carlo was a fine Sacristan, and Ryan Speedo Green a solid Angelotti. The TFC sang here with vibrancy and character, their numbers augmented by the children of the Voices Boston chorus, who did themselves proud while also looking riveted by the passionate drama unfolding in front of their eyes. Tovey's conducting was for the most part alert and responsive, though at times the orchestral playing could have used more bite.

Two-thirds of Sunday afternoon's program, under the baton of Ludovic Morlot, was standard Tanglewood repertoire: Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 3 and Dvorak's Symphony No. 7. But in the driving outer movements of the Dvorak, Morlot, a former BSO assistant conductor who now directs the Seattle Symphony, coaxed some impressively heated, muscular playing that was utterly persuasive.

Pinchas Zukerman's old-school Mozart felt like a tonally rich riposte to more streamlined early music-influenced approaches. But it also felt like a collection of gestures in search of a larger interpretive frame. Most striking of all on Sunday was the opening account of John Luther Adams's "The Light That Fills the World." Inspired by the light that arrives at the end of the long Alaskan winters, the work presents a wash of sonic color, densely layered and slowly shifting. Morlot managed the flow artfully, and the entire Shed seemed to vibrate with these sounds of the north.

Earlier that day in Ozawa Hall, a chamber performance by Tanglewood Music Center fellows included the premiere of Marc Neikrug's String Quartet No. 5, commissioned to honor the TMC's 75th anniversary. It's a very brief work, heavily indebted to Bartok, in which passages of contemplative and lyrical tone are juxtaposed with slapping percussion and strident, upward-rushing lines. The premiere was deftly handled by Paul Kim and Ruda Lee (violins), Bryan Lew (viola), and Aaron Ludwig (cello).

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

At: Tanglewood,

Friday through Sunday

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