

Orchestra sparkles with Torke's jubilant 'Unconquered'

Revolutionary re-enactors, ballet dancers add to pageantry

By Geraldine Freedman August 6, 2016

The Philadelphia Orchestra's marvelous Friday night concert under conductor Stephane Deneve at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center was the unusual combination of patriotism and the ephemeral.

It was also the joyous occasion for ballet fans, as four dancers from the New York City Ballet danced to selections from Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake."

To get the large crowd in the mood for the world premiere of Michael Torke's "Unconquered," which was inspired by the battles at Saratoga during the American Revolution, four re-enactors presented the colors.

While many might have expected the four movement work to have a lot of brass and be aggressively dramatic, Torke's piece was surprisingly sunny, light, jubilant with much pretty lyricism and even perky rhythms. He created an immaculate orchestration filled with color, broad gestures, and interesting secondary activity that supported often long lines of melody.

Deneve enthusiastically conducted a spirited orchestra. The crowd loved it, especially applauding loudly after the first movement, and gave it a standing ovation.

Ashley Hod and Andrew Veyette danced the White Swan pas de deux with a fluid grace. However, she was much more confident after intermission for the Black Swan pas de deux. Both also took solo turns doing multiple fouettes, much to the audience's delight. Rebecca Krohn and Amar Ramasar were very strong in the Russian Dance. Krohn seduced as Ramasar stylishly courted her attention.

For all these dances, associate concertmaster Juliette Kang played long solos and did a superior job. Deneve watched the dancers closely and supplied avid support.

The program's final two masterpieces were originally written by Ravel for Serge Diaghliev's Ballets Russes. Although "Daphnis and Chloe" premiered in 1912, it's the second suite from that score that has become the universal favorite, and no one plays it better than the Philadelphia. It's a signature piece of their repertoire.

As the forest awakens with bird calls, the swirl of the music flows, the phrases linger. The mood is languorous, but a silvery solo from a flute — played beautifully by Jeff Khaner, seduces to an ecstatic, tumultuous dance. Deneve was intense, passionate, set strong cues and paced with plenty of room for nuance. The crowd loved it.

Ravel's "La Valse" was for Diaghliev but premiered in 1910 as a concert piece. The piece swells and swoons with sumptuous colors, gradually picking up for a frenzied ending. The orchestra sounded fabulous.

Tonight it's "Ratatouille in Concert."