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Concert proves RSO's fluency in Russian

By **Tim Gaylard**

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On Monday night, Maestro David Stewart Wiley and the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra reached into the colorful repertoire of Russian music to serve up a rich feast for a near-capacity crowd of 770 at Jefferson Center. In the second half of the program, Korean-born pianist Young-Ah Tak was on hand to play the widely popular Piano Concerto No. 2 by Rachmaninoff with the orchestra. Altogether, it was a very successful evening of fine music-making.

As a warm-up, the symphony launched into the brilliantly orchestrated "Russian Easter Festival Overture" by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. The numerous solos were handled beautifully, especially the sweet violin sound of concertmaster Akemi Takayama, the liquid cream of Carmen Eby's clarinet, the majestic sound of Jay Crone's trombone and the refined silver thread of Alycia Hugo's flute.

To close the first half of the program, the audience was treated to the relatively unfamiliar Symphony No. 2 by Alexander Borodin. The first movement roared with intensity whereas the second movement sparkled with vitality. In the expansive slow third movement, Wallace Easter played his French horn as romantically as possible, and the second half of the movement, dominated by full strings and brass, was overwhelmingly sonorous. In the final celebratory movement, the percussion section helped bring the whole opus to a truly explosive conclusion.

The Rachmaninoff piece received a persuasive performance from Tak. Starting with the famous succession of gradually louder chords in the first movement, she immediately established complete authority over her instrument. Occasionally, the passionate orchestral sound overpowered the sound of the piano in the larger climaxes, but generally a balance of the forces was maintained.

In the slow movement, flautist Hugo and clarinetist Eby helped maintain the contemplative mood with excellent woodwind solos. The final movement swept the audience along a path of emotional highs and lows, highlighting the brilliance of the soloist and the reliable support of the orchestra.

The exhilarating ending to the concerto brought the audience to its feet with an ovation for both soloist and orchestra.

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