

Chang brings star power to GFSO

By Geraldine Freedman



Sarah Chang

GLENS FALLS — The Glens Falls Symphony Orchestra, which opened its 35th season Sunday afternoon, has been gaining higher performance ground since Charles Peltz took over as its music director 12 years ago. But the more than 1,000 people who attended Sunday's concert were given a blast of star power when violinist Sarah Chang graced the stage for Barber's Violin Concerto.

Dressed in a dazzling black and gold metallic, tiered and strapless gown from her favorite fashion house of Kruszynska Couture of London, Chang was focused and intense in the three-movement work, which was premiered in 1941. Phrases were sensitively nuanced, her tone was sweet, and her technique was effortless and clean.

But this was the first time Chang had ever performed the work, which in itself is pretty amazing considering her vast repertoire, her countless concerts and her work ethic. Nothing is ever left to chance.

That reality changes, however, when a soloist of this caliber works with an orchestra that is also performing the work for the first time. The players struggled some in the first movement with pitch, but Peltz kept everyone on track with a solid beat and a close ear to Chang's phrases. She was able to soar and her cadenza had much edge and fire. The pastoral second movement, which developed into a darkly etched but luminous climax, was better and Chang spun out the melody with long, sustained bows and a wide dynamic palette.

The final movement had Chang playing nonstop for a breathless 110 bars before she could take a bit of a break to recharge and jump in again. Balances were all right but the orchestra's pace was not as fleet and tight as Chang wanted. Her technique is formidable and she wanted to fly. The audience was duly impressed and gave her a standing ovation.

Any slight difficulties the orchestra may have had disappeared with Brahms' Symphony No. 4. Throughout the four very difficult and complex movements, the strings sounded rich, mellow and strong. Pitch in the winds was more centered and the overall ensemble was more solid, although they didn't sound quite as confident as a group as the strings. Entrances were not always as pinpoint accurate as they could have been.

The principal wind players generally shone in their solos. These included the principal clarinet in the second movement and principal flutist Yvonne Hansbrough, who was eloquent in the famous flute solo in the final movement.

The best movement was the third, which had all the brightness, flash, flavor and quickness needed. Despite the technical challenges, everyone's fingers were light and agile. It was excellent.

Peltz conducted with solid steadiness with a good dynamic range, strong phrasing, good pacing, excellent tempos and expansive gestures. The final movement was the hardest to pull together with its myriad sections, which rotated between the winds and the strings. Flow was better when the entire orchestra was engaged.

Also performed was Giovanni Gabrieli's "Canzona septimi toni No. 2" (1597) for eight brass instruments. Originally played in church as two choirs of four players each, these eight played in the pit below the stage. The sound was sunny and cheerful with Peltz setting a buoyant tempo. It was like a fanfare.

The next GFSO concert is Nov. 10 with an Ezra Laderman world premiere, followed on Nov. 11 with the same concert but with Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky reading.