

Glens Falls Symphony ends 35th season with compelling program By Geraldine Freedman

GLENS FALLS — The Glens Falls Symphony Orchestra under its music director Charles Peltz was in top form Sunday afternoon in the final concert of its 35th season. The concert also featured violinist Elizabeth Pitcairn, who has established an international career, as well as running the Luzerne Chamber Music Festival.

What was interesting about the program, besides that the three pieces were all by Russian composers, was that they were written in the 20th century. Yet they were not similar in any other way. This made for compelling listening for the large crowd.

Dmitry Kabalevsky's Overture to "Colas Breugnon" (1938) is a festive, bright, colorful piece with famously catchy rhythms and strong accents. Peltz conducted with flair and the orchestra was first rate as it played with loads of energy and playfulness.

Pitcairn was the soloist in Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1 (1923). Dressed elegantly in a long, orchid colored gown, she played the three movements with great polish and an unsentimental approach. The work is rather odd in that rather than require the violinist to do vast virtuosic displays and be the center of attention, Prokofiev had the violinist often in a supportive conversation with a flute, harp or the string section, who were playing the melody.

Also, the violin part, which was frequently continuous, was often in the upper range trilling, or playing harmonics or small filagreed scales. Only in the first movement did Pitcairn get to play soaring, lyrical melodies. There were occasional hints of other Prokofiev works, including his "Classical Symphony" and Overture to "Romeo and Juliet."

Still, Pitcairn made the most of it. With the first movement beginning mysteriously as if from a distance, Pitcairn spun out the sad, often angular song with much eloquence. In subsequent movements, she was well in control of any technical demands and played with lovely phrasing in the lyrical sections. Peltz provided excellent support with strong pacing and balance control with the orchestra sounding comfortable and able.

These were warm-ups for Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2 (1908), which was an almost 60-minute, four-movement piece with great technical and emotional demands. Peltz caught the sweep of the piece's grand scope with skill to allow the orchestra to sound marvelous. The sheer beauty of the work and its many golden moments washed over the listener from the deep purple harmonies to the brassy exclamations to the cascading strings. The performance couldn't help but result in the audience cheering and giving loud applause. As a side note, pink carnations were passed out to audience members in honor of Mother's Day.