

## Russian masters make for active symphony program



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Joyce Yang

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The Nashville Symphony's Friday performance, the opening evening of the First Tennessee Summer Festival series' second weekend, featured an all-Russian program ranging from folk-inspired dances to rich, expressive melodies.

The ground-level seating in Schermerhorn Symphony Center's Laura Turner Hall was replaced by an assortment of dinner tables, giving the entire hall a more casual feel.

The concert began with the *Polovtsian Dances* from Borodin's *Prince Igor*, which proved to be festive opening.

**Performing Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, pianist Joyce Yang effortlessly navigated the piece's most difficult passages, leaving her a great deal of energy to devote to imaginative, expressive playing. Particularly striking was her focus on emotive innuendo and charming rubato during the work's lighter and more playful moments, while also summoning a rich, singing sound for Rachmaninoff's sweeping melodic passages. During the most raucous and intense moments, Yang's presence could be heard erupting with a fiery quality out of large swells of orchestral sound.**

**Roaring applause followed the booming finale of the piece, punctuating a dazzling performance by Yang.**

Tchaikovsky's emotionally turbulent *Fifth Symphony* was a fitting and yet slightly anomalous end to the program. Although it has its moments of excitement and virtuosic flare, the *Fifth Symphony* is in many ways a much darker and more complex work than the often playful, less weighty pieces in the first half of the evening.

If the *Fifth Symphony* stuck out in this respect, it fit nicely with the unmistakably Russian character of the program, as well as the lush rendering of melodies in all of the works.

The first movement was quite moving but also marred by moments of flatness, lacking intensity and commitment from some sections of the orchestra. This seemed especially true of the violins, who at moments were less of a presence than the music required.

The second movement's French horn solo by Leslie Norton was musically sensitive, precise as well as memorable for its dark, warm sound. Conductor Kelly Corcoran made a habit of producing dramatic buildups through increases in tempo, as opposed to slowing down to amass tension before large climaxes. This was just one way in which her lively conducting made for a fresh encounter with otherwise familiar repertoire.

Although beautifully played, the second movement often felt awkwardly paired with dinner tables and an air of summer frivolity. One had the sense that the audience was relieved by the onset of the third movement, easily the lightest and most refreshing portion of the *Fifth Symphony's* otherwise heavy emotional weight. The final moments of performance were sprawling and energetic, bringing an end to a concert filled with a dynamic assortment of Russian music.