

From romantic Rachmaninoff to Red Violin, he says 'Bravo'

By William Martin
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The Russians came to Glens Falls last Sunday, and what a joy they were.

The Glens Falls Symphony and Music Director Charles Peltz started their Sunday concert with a dazzling reading of Dmitry Kabalevsky's *Colas Breugnot* Overture. Every section of the orchestra shone brightly as they bounced themes

back and forth between them, never missing a syncopated beat.

The percussion section featured crisp xylophone playing, the brasses got to execute no end of sparkling articulations, the woodwinds fluttered and danced and the strings were focused and wonderfully balanced.

Then, after an eye-catching entrance in her purple concert dress, guest artist Elizabeth Pitcairn hoisted her famed Stradivarius — known as the Red Violin — and gave us a silky rendition of Sergey Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1.

Opening with a full, rich and mellow sound, she gave a sonic showcase as the piece progressed.

The highlights for me were the wondrous delicacy of the violin harmonics partnered with the harp and flute in the first movement; the jewel-like polished sound of the Scherzo in spite of the enor-

mous technical difficulty; and the closing passages as the violin fluttered away bird-like in the twilight while the orchestral sound got evermore lush and expressive.

I met John Corigliano, the composer for the film *The Red Violin* — said to be inspired by Ms. Pitcairn's violin — last summer. He did not recognize the name Glens Falls, though he knows Ms. Pitcairn, of course.

If I may be so bold, he should come to know this town and its orchestra as soon as possible: "A super American orchestra meets a great American Composer" would be my thinking.

The huge and ultra-romantic Symphony No. 2 by Sergey Rachmaninoff was, by any measure, a success in every way.

The orchestra sounded better than I ever remember it sounding. The strings were gorgeously full, warm, in tune and expressive to the max. The brass were beautifully balanced, with the French Horns, led by Sophia Goluses, matching the open, brassy fullness of the trumpets, led by Greg Smith; the trombones, led by Christopher Moore; and the always terrific tuba power of David Margison.

The woodwind choir, with added English horn and bass clarinet, was precise and full-sounding.

The clarinet solo that opens the third movement was wistful and pure as played by Christopher Bush. He made me wish, as he always does, that I had studied clarinet.

The Rachmaninoff second is operatic in scope. The opening never fails to suggest, to me, waking up in a dark garden as dawn sneaks in over the horizon. From there, it leads you on an epic journey of love, struggle and triumph that is highlighted by the third movement's endless



Solo violinist Elizabeth Pitcairn at the Glens Falls Symphony's post-concert reception, held at the Hyde Collection in Glens Falls. That's her famed "Red Violin" strapped to her back. *Chronicle photo/Cathy DeDe*

flow of gorgeous, romantic melody.

The problem for a conductor in a piece like this is that there are so many wonderful climactic moments, it is tempting to hit them all full blast. But then, the energy is spent and you have to top it a few lines later and so on and so on.

Well, this was not a problem for Maestro Peltz, I don't think. The pacing was right on the money, allowing the orchestra to bloom in all its glory. Bravo.