

Tchaikovsky Juggernaut Descends on Tivoli

My fall break started with a big “boom” from the brass section of the Chattanooga Symphony, when I went to the Tivoli to hear them perform Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-Flat along with his 5th Symphony, both conducted by Omaha Symphony guest conductor Thomas Wilkins. I have seen other conductors use their whole body to conduct, but never have I seen one use his face as intensely as Wilkins did that night. He kept the emotion with his left hand, time with his right, and cues with his eyes. It was enthralling to watch him lead the musicians through the two Russian pieces with such precision.

Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto is one of his most famous pieces. It was accompanied by pianist Michael Chertock, who has played for many other symphonies across the country. From the very first note, his performance captivated the audience, keeping them entranced in the world of Tchaikovsky. The orchestra deftly banged in the bass and trilled in the treble, producing a sweet melody and magnificent harmony moving from dancing to stomping and from jolly to serious. Each instrument was unified in every measure and mood of each movement.

Tchaikovsky used different folk songs from Russia, France, and Ukraine to compose this piece. When first performed in Moscow in 1875, it was criticized by Tchaikovsky’s teacher Rubenstein and was not accepted by the Russian audience. Yet when it was presented by Tchaikovsky’s friend Hans von Bulow, a German pianist, Americans loved it. The admiration grew on the Russian crowd but Americans have always adored it with enthusiasm.

Tchaikovsky’s 5th Symphony was played with equal intensity and executed immaculately as the Concerto. The four movements shift back and forth between slow and fast, serious and jovial. The bassoon and clarinet took center stage and carried the audience through the score with their serene and subtle melody. The harmony of the violins sang to the audience. The Maestro was pretty much off his podium, swelling with the emotions in the music. What started with a bang ended with a bang as the symphony came to a fantastic finale.

I sat in the front right on the lowest level, in a seat that normally costs \$50. With the Tivoli’s generous student discount, I paid only \$10.

Up next for the Chattanooga Symphony is Beethoven’s 7th Symphony, which they will perform on November 12 and 13, and Dvorak’s 7th Symphony, coming in January. Find out more and buy tickets ahead of time at chattanoogasympphony.org.