

## A dazzling, All-American mélange from the Canton Symphony (Oct. 29)

by Tom Wachunas



On the evening of October 29, while the Cleveland Indians were playing the Chicago Cubs at Wrigley Field in game four of the World Series, the Canton Symphony Orchestra wasted no time setting a festive mood right here in Umstattd Hall. From the rear of the house, all the CSO members — many wearing Indians caps or jerseys — strutted happily down the aisles and up on to the stage, all to boisterous cheers from the audience. Then Gerhardt Zimmermann led orchestra and audience in a stirring sing-along of *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*.

That Tin Pan Alley classic from 1908 — the national anthem of what was once affectionately called “America’s favorite pastime” — was a fitting lead-in to the first selection on a program of all-American music, Victor Herbert’s 1893 work, *American Fantasy*. The work was the Irish-born Herbert’s sparkling celebration of his adopted home of America, featuring an imaginatively varied medley of indigenous songs including *Old Folks at Home*, *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, *Dixie*, and *Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean*. The finale was a delightfully unpretentious arrangement of *The Star Spangled Banner*. From energetic romps with a down-home feel, to passages of a more solemn nature, Zimmermann’s sensitive reading of the material was readily apparent in his ensemble’s crisp, bright playing. What could have been merely a trudging through blasé nostalgia acquired a spirit of palpable reverence.

Next up: *Violin Concerto in D*, composed by Erich Wolfgang Korngold in 1946. The Austrian-born Korngold was already an eminently successful composer of film scores by the time he became a U.S. citizen in 1943. This three-movement work was based largely on themes taken from four of his scores. Surprisingly, the concerto was met with a somewhat tepid response when first performed by Jascha Heifetz with the St. Louis

Symphony Orchestra in 1947. But it has since gained well-deserved attention from contemporary violinists.

Korngold's writing for the soloist called for a particularly daunting degree of bravura and technical virtuosity. Here, guest artist Jinjoo Cho met the challenge with superb expressivity, playing with a fervor so sublime, so riveting, that at times she seemed to be channeling supernatural forces. Cho must be something of a shaman, or a conjurer, who has taught her instrument to sing in a voice at once bold and delicate. Her intonation was consistently warm throughout a dazzling journey into lyrical radiance that often included ravishing flights into unearthly notes in the high register, and a finale that was a pyrotechnical phenomenon in its own right.

In both George Gershwin's *An American in Paris*, and Leonard Bernstein's *On The Waterfront: Symphonic Suite*, the CSO delivered, once again, truly compelling performances. The Gershwin was a fascinating gem of sultry melancholy balanced with jazzy swag. And the Bernstein was a masterpiece of steely intensity, replete with lush orchestral textures that superbly articulated pulsing dramatic tensions, all building to an explosive and exuberant final note. Like the proverbial loud crack of the bat that signals a grand slam.

(Sigh.) Oh, would that the Indians had done as much.

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