

## Splendid Sibelius, Stratospheric Tchaikovsky from the Canton Symphony (June 25)

by Tom Wachunas

*“Music begins where the possibilities of language end.”* —Sibelius



The first selection on the June 25 “Triumphant Tchaikovsky” program from the Canton Symphony Orchestra (CSO) was Jean Sibelius’ Symphony No. 3 in C Major.

With this work, premiered in 1907, Sibelius offered a bold departure from the explosive emotionalism so prevalent in late-Romantic era music. This symphony was a renewed embrace of Classicism’s purity of form and melody, and one that, oddly enough, left many initial audiences of the day somewhat bewildered.

But here, under the ever-enlivening baton of Gerhardt Zimmermann, no such disappointment ensued.

Throughout the work, the lavish sonority of the CSO strings articulated a riveting vista, alternately austere, mystical and exhilarating, suffused with crisp, textured harmonies and colorful contrapuntal interplays, all impeccably balanced with zesty woodwinds and sturdy exclamations from the brass.

Then, talk about connective programming. The next selection was *Essay No. 1 – After Sibelius*, written in 2006 by African-American composer Rick Robinson. Inspired by the compositional style of Sibelius - particularly the theme of the first movement coda in the 3<sup>rd</sup> symphony – Robinson’s marvelously crafted homage is an episodic argument, or dialogue of sorts, between what he calls the “Aware Self” and “Shadow Self.”

The work is a complex continuous narrative, dense with contrasting motifs that sweep across a vast, intricately textured soundscape of constantly shifting colors and dimensions. Every section of the ensemble had a clear and strong voice in this emotional

conversation, speaking in stirring crescendos, from gentle moments of euphoric reflection, into louder strident passages. Like navigating through dark storms, the orchestra sailed to a lovely parting of the clouds with eloquent finesse.

After intermission, the CSO transformed Tchaikovsky's glorious Violin Concerto in D Major into an enthralling corporeal event. Internationally acclaimed violinist Jinjoo Cho has a distinctive performance style that offered more than just the flawless precision of her lightning-fast fingers, or the crystalline fecundity of tones flowing from her instrument. For as much as she illuminated this pillar of violin literature with commanding authority, dispatching her highest notes as if to pierce the stratosphere, she was in turn played by the music.

When not actually playing the violin, she surrendered herself to listening to the orchestra, as someone enraptured, gracefully swaying, her face aglow in a beatific smile, sending vigorous nods of approval and encouragement aimed at her fellow artists, who responded with equal verve.

A particularly uncanny — though in retrospect, wholly understandable — incident transpired when the sheer intensity of Cho's electrifying cadenza leading to the conclusion of the first movement caused a serious breach of concert hall etiquette, breaking the golden rule of *Thou Shalt Not Applaud Until The Last Movement Is Finished*.

So sayeth Silly Protocol. This moment, though, was no scattering of a few folks nervously clapping. It was a spontaneous standing ovation from *many* riding a big wave of boisterous praise. And even then, think of it as but a rehearsal for the instantaneous thunder of appreciation that erupted at the concerto's utterly spectacular end. Triumphant Tchaikovsky indeed.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 5, 2022.*

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