

NATIONAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

All-Mozart Program, Jan. 19 2020

Overture to "Il Re Pastore" (The Shepherd King), K. 208
Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466, pianist Orli Shaham
Symphony No. 41 in C Major, K. 551, "Jupiter"

Overture

I had not heard this work before, and it did not make a great impression on me upon first hearing. Overtures are best enjoyed when one has some familiarity with the tunes of the opera, since most overtures are a pastiche of such themes – Rossini's being a prime example.

Concerto in D minor

This is one of only two Mozart piano concertos in a minor key, and has some elaborate writing for the soloist. Orli Shaham did a splendid job with it. The outer movements are energetic and powerful; the slow movement is a rondo with a peaceful theme as the refrain, with episodes in a more turbulent vein. The pianist flawlessly alternated between the delicate and the stormy, maintaining expressive phrasing throughout. The final movement, also a rondo, is in a joyous mood, underlined by a switch to a major key at the conclusion. Although the program stated that the piece would be played with cadenzas by Beethoven, Orli modified the one in the third movement with her own inventions – more on this later.

Symphony No. 41, "Jupiter"

I have heard Piotr Gajewski conduct this work on several occasions, beginning with what was then the Montgomery Chamber Orchestra at the Strathmore Mansion, before there was a Music Center. Like fine wine, his performances, and the orchestra's, improve with age. Here it was masterfully done. The first movement was bouncy and joyful, but the crowning glory was the finale with its plethora of thematic subjects that culminate in fugal juxtaposition.

On a personal note, I was fortunate to be Orli Shaham's designated driver, and we had interesting conversations on our way from and to the airport. She explained that in the third-movement cadenza, she played her own restatement of the orchestral tutti that opens the movement, later switching to finish with what Beethoven wrote. It was an interesting contrast to the first movement, where the piano and orchestra do not repeat each other's themes.

Congratulations to Piotr and the musicians on wonderful performance. However, I was dismayed at the poor attendance – I estimated that about 1/3 of the seats were empty. One would think that this music, and a world-class soloist, would attract more listeners.