

PENINSULA REVIEWS

Monterey Symphony - “Merriment”

by Lyn Bronson

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Philippe Bianconi & Max Bragado-Darman

.....The earlier parts of the program were much more fun. We heard five minutes of Erik Satie’s *Gymnopédies* No. 1 & 2, two of the most identifiable piano pieces ever written and embellished with some appropriately quirky orchestrations, plus guest soloist for the evening’s concert **Philippe Bianconi** in splendid performances of **Ravel’s Concerto in G Major** for Piano and Orchestra and the rarely heard **Fauré’s Ballade Op. 19**, a solo work we were hearing in its piano and orchestral version.

There have been some legendary artists who have played the Ravel G Major Piano Concerto with such panache and gusto they practically owned it – Martha Argerich, Arturo Benedetti-Michelangeli, Leonard Bernstein and Alicia de Larrocha, among others. Well, Philippe Bianconi just joined that distinguished group. His performance was so masterful and natural, it just hummed along and jazzed its way into our hearts. The lovely slow movement was a masterpiece of expressive and dynamic subtlety, and the final movement was a knockout.

An interesting aspect of Bianconi’s performance of the Ravel Concerto was his natural choreography whipping around all over the keyboard. It was fascinating to watch because it was always natural and an inherent part of the music. There was none of the histrionics of Lang Lang, with his exaggerated movements and soulful looks to heaven. There were no wasted motions in Bianconi’s performance – it was totally organic and a delight both to hear and to see.

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