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Symphony review: Verdi, Bruch and Shostakovich played with precision and beauty

By Will Kesling

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[...] Max Bruch was regarded as one of the greatest composers in Germany in the latter half of the 19th century. Today, his name rings just two bells, both works for violin: his famous first violin concerto and his engaging “Scottish Fantasy.” It is on his first violin concerto that Bruch’s reputation rests. First sketched out in 1857, it was his first large-scale orchestral work. Nothing wrong with being a one-hit wonder when your masterpiece is music of profound beauty, instantly likeable, passionate and resonating with depth.

For violinists, the concerto provides a profound showcase for the instrument. There are stunning, virtuosic passages that really do make the violin sing as it soars again and again. William Hagen’s violin rises from the orchestra to ever-loftier heights with a performance that is as passionate as it is poignantly phrased. The second movement is pure romance. Hagen’s beautiful tone captures the heartbreaking themes that are woven delicately within the soulfully played orchestral accompaniment. The energetic, gypsy-themed finale’s rhythmic drive exudes vigor and yet resonates with rapture. The audience flew to its feet at the concerto’s conclusion and at the playing of Hagen’s encore, Bach’s “Prelude in E Major.” [...]