

GFSO piano soloist crosses borders to

BY GERALDINE FREEDMAN
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MUSIC REVIEW

GLENS FALLS — A Glens Falls Symphony Orchestra concert under music director Charles Peltz is getting to be a happening: innovative programming with works by two geniuses, which were played with skill and conviction, and the superb talents of a competition-winning piano soloist. The large crowd couldn't go wrong Sunday afternoon at the Glens Falls High School auditorium.

Italian pianist Roberto Plano

was not only the effortless soloist in Chopin's Piano Concerto in F minor (1829) written when Chopin was 19; he was also part of the ensemble — his first ever as a pianist — in Stravinsky's Suite (1946), compiled from his 1911 ballet score for "Petrouchka."

The concerto was Chopin's first effort at writing a concerto but his style and unique piano vocabulary were already evident. Plano had all the right touches: a crystalline,

singing tone that gently coaxed the luscious melodies and which easily became forthright and declamatory when necessary. His technique over the many florid passages was fluid and relaxed. Pulses were strong under the constant flow.

His first movement was well sung and strongly nuanced. In the slow second movement with its inspired piano writing, Plano played the sensuous melody with great seduction. Each phrase breathed. The orchestra gave him plenty of room. When the music moved into

more impassioned passages with Plano making sweeping gestures of technical brilliance, the orchestra gave him the right level of support. The final mazurka had an airy lilt with more impressive technical demands.

OVATION FOR ENCORE

As an encore, Plano played a selection from Friedrich Gulda's "Play Piano Play" collection. A mix of jazz, Khachaturian and stride piano, Plano sizzled. That got the audience on its feet.

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great effect

The Stravinsky score is a marvel. When it premiered in 1911, it was a whole new way of making music from the way the instruments were used to a new rhythmic and harmonic language. Color is everywhere even as it's descriptive of the tale. Difficult to conduct with its constantly shifting meters, tempos and cues, Peltz must have lived with the score for a while to be able to conduct it so seamlessly.

This was the first time the orchestra has taken on a score of this complexity, but their intense effort

paid off. Every section excelled, despite the thorny technical demands that also required a harder-edged tone.

And Plano knocked off the piano charts like a pro. He said at intermission that initially he'd had misgivings but one rehearsal made him feel comfortable with the new role and gave him connections to the other players he would never have experienced. In Europe, a known soloist cannot be hired as an ensemble player. Lines can't be crossed, he said. So this was a rare treat.