

# Classical beat: One we saw, three to see

## GF Symphony: Kudos to guest Roberto Plano, and Stravinsky

By William Martin  
Chronicle Freelance

The Glens Falls Symphony Orchestra attached the title "A Magical Russian Adventure" to the program for its concert last Sunday, Nov. 6. While my brain can't stretch far enough to connect Frédéric Chopin (who was half Polish and half French) to things Russian, the magic of Roberto Plano's playing of the Chopin Piano Concerto No. 2 was enough.

Mr. Plano first arrived in this area in 2003 when he performed the Grieg Concerto with the Symphnoy. He returned in 2007 to play the Poulenc Double Concerto with Kotaro Fukuma at the other piano. Now, it seems a tradition has been established as he returned again, this time to play the Chopin. And play he did.

The combination of the orchestra's Steinway — with its round, never-harsh tone — and Robert Plano's touch always seems a natural fit. In the second movement, the piano part enters in the deep bass register but quickly climbs up the keyboard to spin out a short but delicious descending melody, with a heart-stopping drop that pulls at the heart like few other pieces I know.

Mr. Plano played it to perfection, with

restrained tenderness and flawless technique.

Throughout the three movements, Music Director-Conductor Charles Peltz kept his orchestra nicely balanced with the piano, letting out some big sound when appropriate, but never obscuring the soloist. The orchestra followed nicely and provided the foundation upon which the pianist spun Chopin's magic tunes.

The raucous third movement, based on the Polish peasant dance known as the Mazurka, evokes images of a country dance, with a mini-drama of partners who are at times joyful, flirty, tender, jocular, as it gallops towards the inevitable happy ending that composers of the 19th century usually attached to such scenes. Peasants are never happier than when being depicted by the Romantics, I think.

Mr. Plano's short but wildly received encore, *Play Piano Play* by Friedrich Gulda, earned the audience's standing ovation.

Alternating sections of boogie-woogie piano and classical riffs a bit like *Flight of the Bumble Bee*, the piece was odd but fun at the same time.

**Then: Stravinsky was a treat**

The second half of the show was a treat.



It was a busy weekend, but the Symphony got its turnout on Sunday afternoon. Here: Pianist Roberto Plano, just visible in the glow of the stage, launches into his encore.

Chronicle photo/Cathy DeDe

We got to hear music by the great Igor Stravinsky. Hence the program's Russian reference.

The particular piece played was Stravinsky's collection of selections from his larger ballet score, *Petrushka*. It's the story of an obscene clown who strives for love, only to be defeated by his own passions. It is a musical score that invites — even demands — the visual participation of the listener.

If you listen expecting the emotional thrill ride of the great Romantic composers, Stravinsky will let you down. But if you open your ears and your visual imagination, you are treated to wondrous and

fantastical stories rooted in the Russian folk culture, or whatever stories your head can conjure. And, Stravinsky does it with sounds that were never heard before he thought them up, combined with crystalline clarity, humor, and a dark violence that somehow has a profound beauty of its own.

Mr. Peltz conducted like a man who knows this music well and loves it. He was deeply engaged in pulling the best performances possible from his players. While the scalpel-like precision that Stravinsky demands was not always there, the spirit was. The demanding solo work from every section leader in the orchestra was mostly on the money, with highlights from flutist Yvonne Hans-

brough, trumpeter Greg Smith, clarinetist Christopher Moore, and harpist Elizabeth Huntley, with the entire percussion section leading the way.

As I said to Christopher Bush this summer when his chamber group played "The Tale of a Soldier" at the Hudson River Music Hall in Hudson Falls, I never thought this area would see live performances of Stravinsky. Now I am twice blessed — thrice, even, as I recall also the Battenkill Chorale's concert of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* a couple of years back.