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Christopher Taylor with the Milwaukee Symphony Lutoslawski Piano Concerto

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MSO delivers glowing Tchaikovsky symphony, seldom-played concerto

By Elaine Schmidt, Special to the Journal Sentinel – Oct. 17, 2014

Something old, something new(ish) and something you've probably never heard before were on the bill for Friday's Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra program.

Led by associate conductor Francesco Lecce-Chong and joined by pianist Christopher Taylor, the orchestra performed a largely unknown Grazyna Bacewicz overture, Witold Lutoslawski's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 in E minor.

The second half of the program was devoted to what proved to be a glowing performance of the Tchaikovsky symphony. Lecce-Chong, who conducted without a score, and the players brought a huge palette of colors; exquisite phrasing; sensitive, disciplined use of vibrato; and tremendous energy to the performance.

Throughout the first movement, the orchestra delivered long, elegant phrases and gave constant attention to gradual changes in dynamics and textures. The second movement formed a graceful arc, from whispered opening to some stirring playing before returning to its opening sounds and tempo.

A lovely, lilting rendition of the third movement gave way, with just a tiny pause,

to a big, broad take on the fourth movement. Clean string sounds, fluid combined wind sounds, unapologetically bold brassy passages and some heart-on-the-sleeve musical abandon brought the audience to its feet at the piece's end.

Taylor gave a performance of the Lutoslawski concerto built of precise playing and interpretive conviction. His performance was nicely matched by clean, crisp orchestral playing.

The concerto, built of four movements that are played without pause, is an intellectually fascinating combination of chance elements, atmospheric sounds and strictly notated, angular passages. Sections, built more of sound and effects than melodic lines, develop and then fragment, as though the composer is interrupting himself with another idea.

Taylor's performance was commanding, fiercely punctuated and full of physical power. He brought vivid color and great intensity to the piece's accompanied piano lines and cadenza passages.

The program opened with a crisp, cohesive performance of Bacewicz's busy "Overture for Symphony Orchestra." The 1943 piece, which is built of swift, often stark contrasts

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and is largely unknown today, proved a colorful opening to the concert.

IF YOU GO

This Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra concert will be repeated at 8 p.m. Saturday in

Uihlein Hall at the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, 929 N. Water St. For ticket information, visit www.mso.org or call (414) 273-7206.

<http://www.jsonline.com/entertainment/arts/mso-delivers-glowing-tchaikovsky-symphony-seldom-played-concerto-b99369693z1-279615112.html>