

Improved Evanston Symphony Orchestra perform[s]

BY DOROTHY ANDRIES | Classical Music Critic

Last Modified: Oct 23, 2012 01:58PM

Two area orchestras played over the weekend, the fully professional Lake Forest Symphony and the Evanston Symphony Orchestra, which was established as a volunteer organization and is determined to remain a community ensemble.

...

Evanston Symphony Orchestra

It is impossible to overemphasize the improvement that Maestro Larry Eckerling has made in the Evanston Symphony Orchestra since he took over as music director a decade ago.

With such advances, of course, come heightened expectations, but the opening concert of the ESO's 67th season fulfilled them admirably.

The program was titled Viennese Masterworks because each composition had its premiere in Vienna. Held Sunday afternoon Oct. 21 at Pick-Staiger Concert Hall on Northwestern University's Arts Campus, the program opened with a fine performance of the Overture to Mozart's opera "The Magic Flute." The composer's music is nothing if not transparent, but Eckerling's ensemble delivered it skillfully, from the initial three majestic chords to the finale when they gracefully return.

The soloist in Beethoven's Concerto No. 4 for piano and orchestra was Matthew Hale. He is not only known as violinist Rachel Barton Pine's principal accompanist, but also as a teacher at the Music Institute of Chicago and an international soloist in his own right.

His approach to the concerto was a thoughtful one. He was not afraid to linger over the sweet sounding passages, allowing space between the notes and phrases, giving us time to appreciate Beethoven's melodies before moving on. He has a secure technique, which allowed him to whip through the trills and bombast that the composer demands.

Eckerling and his musicians were sensitive collaborators, but also more than equal the Beethoven's wild Rondo which concluded the concerto.

Brahms' Second Symphony ended the concert.

After a rough opening, the orchestra pulled together and began to demonstrate the dexterity of its woodwinds and the shining texture of its brass. The piece becomes quite melancholy in the second movement, and it was then the strings explored their transporting power. Throughout, concertmaster Julian Arron ably demonstrated why he is in the first chair.