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## Philharmonic shines with sunny Dvorak Also, pianist Alon Goldstein is masterful with solo parts in Grieg piano concerto

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If there were a unifying thread to Saturday's outing by the Rhode Island Philharmonic at Veterans Memorial Auditorium, it would perhaps be that all the offerings contained elements of folk music. Certainly that was true of Bartok's "Dance Suite," which was a Philharmonic premiere. And the folk-like melodies in the Grieg piano concerto and Dvorak's Eighth Symphony could hardly be ignored.

Conductor Larry Rachleff said the program was another effort in "spanning the globe," with music mostly from Eastern Europe and, of course, Scandinavia, which produced the popular Grieg concerto, last done here in 2004.

Pianist Alon Goldstein, who has partnered with the Philharmonic a couple of times in recent seasons, tackled the solo parts in the Grieg and did a masterful job. He emphasized the score's lyrical qualities, playing down any showiness, although the first-movement cadenza was pretty dramatic.

But the dreamy, slow movement spoke more to Goldstein's artistry, with its lilting phrases and warm tone. ***He's got a flawless technique, but it's his musical savvy that stands out.***

Rachleff opened the evening with the Bartok, which was written for the 50th anniversary of the merging of the Danube cities of Buda and Pest. It dates from 1923, before the composer's popular "Concerto for Orchestra." But it's hardly ever performed, perhaps, said Rachleff, because it's "bloody hard."

In Rachleff's hands, the performance was a study in contrasts, from laid-back to driving, and sober to humorous. The orchestra sounded great throughout the performance, especially the blazing brass section.

At one point, the celesta player joined the pianist for about 16 bars of four-hands keyboard work, then hopped back to his station.

But it was the sunny Dvorak that stole the show. Rachleff called the piece a "smiling symphony," which made a lot of sense given his warm, upbeat take.

The cello section deserved a hand for their lush introduction, but there were a lot of stellar moments from the players, including trumpeter Joe Foley's last-movement fanfare, and flutist Sue Thomas' breathless solo in the same section.

Most people think of the “New World” symphony when mentioning Dvorak, but the Eighth might just be his finest. The sketch for the score was completed in a little more than two weeks in September 1889, and the scoring was finished in early November.

Like the Grieg, the Dvorak was all heart. There was nothing showy about it, just great music-making, with a wonderful swagger to the Allegretto grazioso third movement.  
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