

After Beethovenian grandeur, BSO pivots toward Paris

By Jeremy Eichler

Last night in Symphony Hall, fate was not apostrophized, universal brotherhood was not declared. But there was plenty of music for dancing - courtesy of Stravinsky's "Petrushka" ballet. In other words, after serving generous amounts of Teutonic grandeur via its recently completed Beethoven cycle, the Boston Symphony Orchestra changed course this week and set off for Paris. That at least is where all three works on this delightful program were introduced, and all, in one way or another, breathe the distinctive air of that city.

Before arriving at Stravinsky, however, the program began with a deftly chosen curtain-raiser, Honegger's lovely symphonic poem "Pastorale d'été," in a particularly gracious performance led by the Italian conductor Fabio Luisi. The piece itself bears a scene-setting epigraph from Rimbaud ("I have embraced the summer dawn"), and this music deftly conjures the sense of the natural world awakening from sleep. It was only the third time the BSO had played the work in its history, but Luisi drew playing of real subtlety and refinement.

It was technically Luisi's BSO debut though he arrives as a well-respected midcareer conductor who leads both the Dresden Staatskapelle and the Vienna Symphony. The evening's other debuting artist was a much less familiar name, the **impressive young French pianist Lise de la Salle**.

At 21, she could be in that awkward career stage, the nebulous zone at the end of the prodigy path, but that does not appear to be the case. As a performer, de la Salle seemed focused and comfortable in her skin, dispatching Saint-Saens's Piano Concerto No. 2 with great poise and clarity. It's not the easiest piece through which to gauge the full range of a player's artistry, but de la Salle made the most of its abundant fireworks. The solo introduction was fluid and conveyed a keen feel for the music's Bachian roots, the passagework in the jaunty second movement sparkled, and the Presto was lithe and remarkably clear.

After intermission, the Stravinsky, presented here in its 1947 version, had abundant color, character, and rhythmic vitality. Luisi's conducting was crisp and intelligent, and the BSO players rose to the occasion, individually and as an ensemble. Luisi recognized several in the percussion, brass, and woodwind sections with deserving solo bows; principal trumpet Thomas Rolfs drew the loudest cheers for his first-rate solo in the third tableau.■

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