

DAILY CAMERA

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Hoopes, Ehnes bring violin week to sublime close

By Kelly Dean Hansen For the Camera

The two violinists that closed the Colorado Music Festival's mid-season week of concertos are highly different in many ways, but the most significant aspect they had in common during their appearances was a certain lofty sublimity in their interpretations.

Chad Hoopes is 16 years old and he played the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto on Friday evening. Read that sentence again to grasp its enormity. The work is considered one of the most fiendishly challenging works in the repertoire, a vehicle for the likes of Itzhak Perlman.

And Hoopes is an Eagle Scout who not only tackled the monster piece, but brought it a level of delicacy and nuance that are rare in such a warhorse. His interactions with the orchestra were on a professional level, and his intermission interview with music director Michael Christie revealed a thoughtful, self-aware maturity.

The tremendous first movement drew instant mid-work applause, which is a great compliment from the etiquette-savvy CMF audience. The entire performance was a miracle to behold.

Christie's choice to complement the concerto was the same composer's Fifth Symphony, a great masterpiece of cyclic form (where a main "fate" theme recurs throughout the movements). The orchestra was full of power and passion in this performance, including a beautiful horn solo from Amy Jo Rhine in the slow movement (which was allegedly the source for John Denver's "Annie's Song").

Amazingly, this was Christie's first Tchaikovsky symphony in his decade with the CMF.

The violin festival concluded on Sunday night with a performer whose experience is much greater: **Grammy Award-winning James Ehnes**. Playing to an utterly sold out crowd, Ehnes took the exalted Beethoven concerto to truly celestial heights.

His loving renditions of the cadenzas by Fritz Kreisler were particularly memorable. Despite the unusual heat Sunday evening, the audience and the performer seemed to be sharing a moment of ecstasy, and the orchestra took part in this as well during the glorious climaxes of the finale.

The composer's Sixth Symphony, the "Pastorale," closed the concert. In mood, it is probably the best one of the nine to match the concerto, which has its own "pastoral" qualities.

Curiously, this was the exact same program that opened Christie's first "mini-festival" in 2008. And this raises an interesting question. Where does he go from here? What are the possibilities for the now-standard event in future CMF seasons?

Having tackled Beethoven and Brahms, there are not too many composers for whom a complete symphonic cycle seems feasible. Robert Schumann perhaps comes to mind. And besides the piano and the violin, the cello is the only instrument with a sufficient concerto repertoire for the event.

It will be interesting to see what he decides to do or if such weeks continue at all. It would be a shame if they did not, since they always produce memorable concerts and full houses.

The CMF orchestra returns to the stage for Igor Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" on Thursday and Friday. For tickets and information, call 303-440-7666 or visit www.coloradomusicfest.org.