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Monday, September 26, 2005

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## Two Tchaikovsky works open 32nd Thayer season

### 5th Symphony highlighted by horn player's emotion

CONCERT REVIEW

By John Zeugner Telegram & Gazette Reviewer

**FITCHBURG**— The 32nd season of the Thayer Symphony, under Maestro Toshimasa Francis Wada's direction for nearly a quarter century, began Saturday night with a double-barreled blast of Tchaikovsky.

The first shot, his passionate Violin Concerto, was something of a misfire and occasionally off target.

The post-intermission second shot, Tchaikovsky's radiant 5th Symphony, was far more successful — poignant, sumptuously executed, with stunningly warm horn and woodwind work.

Violin soloist Su Yeon Lee impeccably handled her work in the concerto, and unlike some prodigies she seemed to have penetrated the torrid emotions of Tchaikovsky's work, but, alas, she was not well served by the orchestra, nor the audience for that matter.

The nearly 26-minute first movement of the concerto makes most audiences restive, especially if they've experienced, as the near capacity crowd at the Dukakis Center Saturday night did, spectacular violin pyrotechnics from Ms. Lee, so that by the end of that movement oftentimes an audience will burst into applause, as much to release tensions as to celebrate artistry.

The Thayer crowd stood up and cheered, requiring Maestro Wada to turn around, put the audience back in their seats and explain, "There are two more movements."

More peculiar still, during the first movement, after some particularly deft playing from Ms. Lee, the audience applauded while the orchestral accompaniment continued, as if this were a jazz concert and Ms. Lee had merely done a solo riff requiring acknowledgement from the crowd. Maestro Wada flailed outward with his left hand to shut the audience down. Ms. Lee handled the distracting appreciation with aplomb, but on her own she could hardly overcome the irregularities of balance and tone with the orchestra, or the audience outbursts.

After the intermission (and for what was billed as a Gala Opening Concert, there was considerable buzz in the lobby about why no refreshments were for sale anywhere) the concert fulfilled its promise.

It seemed either Maestro Wada had inspired the orchestra with some fierce locker room halftime remarks, or, more likely, the greater familiarity and rehearsal time with Tchaikovsky's warhorse 5th paid

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In any event the orchestra delivered a coherent, emotional rendering that swept everything before it. The ever-enthusiastic Thayer crowd at the conclusion leapt to its feet and Maestro Wada gave the first call to horn player Lucy Colwell-Snyder, who richly deserved that honor.

The 5th is a motto symphony with its haunting main theme repeated in each movement. That theme seems to knit or perhaps coil through the symphony's mounting exaltation and emotional deliverance.

In the second movement the principal horn carries the motto forward and Ms. Colwell-Snyder's tone, meltingly warm and in unwavering pitch as she dialogued with various woodwinds, provided the deepest emotional engagement with the audience. Those moments alone were worth the price of admission.

Maestro Wada's swift waltz third movement and thunderous fourth served only to punctuate that earlier extraordinary apex.

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