

Violinist Pinchas Zukerman puts on a performance of pure artistry at the Orpheum

By Lloyd Dykk

What we've gained in concert decorum over the ages we've lost in fun. When the conductor and soloist Franz Clement premiered Ludwig van Beethoven's *Violin Concerto in D Major* in 1806, he wowed them in the second half by playing the fiddle upside down, using only one string. And violinist Nicolo Paganini, in the second half of his programs, liked amusing audiences with his barnyard imitations.



One senses that the barnyard is never far away in a Pinchas Zukerman performance, either—and it certainly wasn't the last time he played that Beethoven concerto here, in 2004. During most of that show, he stamped his feet on the Orpheum stage like a cowboy or a flamenco dancer, obviously to take the beat away from the conductor.

That was not fun, but a lot seems to have changed since then. Playing with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra under Bramwell Tovey on Monday night, Zukerman showed that he is capable of restraint, and considerably more than that.

This was a performance of pure artistry, with Zukerman gathering his dazzling technique into a seamless expression of what is arguably the world's finest violin concerto, one that doesn't show a trace of trouble on its smilingly benign face.

This all-Beethoven concert offered only the best of the German master's output, and included his *Symphony No. 7 in A Major*, which is arguably the finest of the nine. William Wordsworth's line "the still, sad music of humanity" might have been written to describe its allegretto movement.

Many conductors take this magnificent section, which haunted Franz Schubert all his life, too slowly. Tovey opted for a pace that felt ideally on the fast-ish side, with faster being better because it suggests a more dignified bravery, one that is somehow above sadness.

This was a beautiful performance—and one fully attuned to what the symphony is all about, which is rhythm. Rhythm is integral to it. It subsumes even thematic development and is no doubt what a stunned Richard Wagner meant when he praised Beethoven's seventh as being "the apotheosis of the dance".

The playing was marvellous, right down to the timpanist, who for once didn't bludgeon the daylights out of the beat.

Not even the filler was minor, it being Beethoven's superb *Egmont* overture. The Orpheum looked packed and should have been. Standing O.

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