

## Hilary Hahn Performs with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra in Korea A Superb Ensemble, a Sated Audience

*The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra displayed explosive power during Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto with Hilary Hahn starring as the headlining soloist. The performance gave a sneak preview of Hahn's recording of the concerto, which is yet to be recorded. Standing alone, both elite performers collaborated on stage in Seongnam, Korea to show just why they are a unique, world-class ensemble.*

Written by Lee Jeong-Yeob (Music columnist, Photos by Studio Na+飛)

On October 11, 2008, Hilary Hahn appeared as the special guest of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra (VSO) in its Asia-Pacific Tour, which made its second stop in Korea at the Seongnam Art Center. The performance gave Korean audiences a rare opportunity to relish her interpretation of Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto in D major, Opus 5* even before her recording is done.

Listening to a pre-recording performance of a musician is supposed to give any music lover thrilling expectations of what is to come, particularly if the musician is young and has already demonstrated steady growth and maturity. Audiences and critics alike enjoy discussing the anticipation and possibilities of a prodigy's ability and the scale of accomplishment he or she might finally achieve.

The violin performance by Hilary Hahn triggers an image of natural wood furniture with untwisted grain patterns. Her classical tones based on sophisticated intonations and stable bowing can be imagined as annual rings of wood furniture scrupulously made. The façade of the furniture is full of errorless, modern lines rather than flowery decorations.

Immediately into the performance the listener had to be struck with the unexpected slow tempo of the introduction to the first movement. The unhurried pace sparked suspicions that the expansive nature of the opening Tchaikovsky-esque rhythms might have been annulled. However, Hahn revealed her determination to perform every detail with perfection, slowly caressing the exposition and allowing the development to blossom. One might have expected that at least for once, she would accelerate at a certain appropriate point with *rubato* (rhythmic flexibility) while playing the cadenza and the Finale, Hahn showed even fiercer obsession with technique as the concerto became increasingly robust. The dramatic highs and lows usually expected of a performance of Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto* were rather weaker, but her performance introduced a new interpretation of the timeless concerto, linking the individual parts seamlessly with effortless-sounding technique.

VSO Music Director Bramwell Tovey chose to emphasize the codas (a concluding passage of a movement that breaks from the formal structure the piece), revealing his intention to enrich Hahn's interpretation with stylish elegance. The introduction of the third movement began *attacca*, and the

intense *tutti* of the new movement made a superb contrast with Hahn's calm, composed ending of the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement.

When Hahn's new recording is released, her interpretation is guaranteed to secure its position as a notable alternative resource for violinists. Its focus on sophisticated interpretation will offer a refreshing addition to other recordings, which often emphasize a soloist's glamorous technique and dazzling tempos.

#### Splendorous Brass Performance Glitters like Gold

The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra also featured *The Linearity of Light*, a piece by Vancouver-based composer Jeffrey Ryan. By using the different timbres of different instruments' tones, the work explores interactions between sound and color by presenting one timbre color linearly, and then by interfering it with other instrumental timbres in order to change the orchestral color, just as a ray of light can be reflected and refracted. Despite the contemporary nature of the work, the music was very accessible for the audience as the work itself is quite tonal.

The main piece of the evening's repertoire was Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. The performance was of equal weight to the previous pieces, and brought out even more colors and textures of orchestration. The piece itself poses a challenge to any orchestra due to Berlioz's textures, characterized by French transparency contrasting with dark, thickly orchestrated parts. The orchestra was careful to stay in balance so that the prominent brass did not overshadow their colleagues throughout the work, and in the third movement, the orchestra performed very sensitively, giving the whole movement a feeling of subtle chamber music. The VSO's performance of the movement's post-oboe episode was serene as if submerged in faint, pastoral scenery, but also vivid enough to carve out the musical motif in the audience's mind.

In addition, VSO Director Tovey chose to bring out the magical gloomy aspect hidden behind the splendid marching rhythm in the fourth movement *Marche au supplice*, or *March to the Scaffold*. As time went by, the rhythmic theme came alive, step by step, to achieve the dual effect of cruelty and liberation *Symphonie Fantastique* aims to convey.

In the introduction of the fifth movement where different instruments pour out new and old melodies in order to portray the Witch's Sabbath, the overall coordination, for a moment, seemed to be slightly out of sync, but as the *Dies irae* theme returned, the dark, eminent sound of the brass carried the orchestra through.

The explosive power the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra demonstrated during the coda was exceptional, and the audience responded with appreciative cheers and applause.