

Music Arts Reviews**Violinist Shlomo Mintz and the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra pull out the fireworks for season opener**

By Lloyd Dykk

**Vancouver Symphony Orchestra****With Shlomo Mintz. At the Orpheum on Saturday, September 26. Continues September 28**

The world has no shortage of beautiful violin concertos, and high in the top 10 is the *Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor* by Max Bruch.

It's still dazzling today—imagine hearing it with new ears in the mid-1800s when it startled the world. The apotheosis of violin expression, it climbs stratospheric heights on the E string and plunges directly into an earthy chordal effect of low double stops. It revels in virtuosity and spins melody without end. It's fresh, romantic, zestfully uncorny, and deftly orchestrated. I love the way the slow movement comes out of the first one—is gradually exuded from it.

It's full of surprises and when it unfairly turned Bruch into a one-hit wonder, it surprised him too. No wonder that when the irritating critic Eduard Hanslick gave it niggardly praise, Bruch told him to go jump in the lake and drown himself.

It was the highlight of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's opening concert on September 26 at the Orpheum—a noninflationary opening, meaning no Gustav Mahler, and it didn't need any (Bruch scorned Mahler). Shlomo Mintz, who hasn't been to Vancouver since the mid-1980s, was the violinist. He ate it up whole and gave it just what it needed—all the fireworks with wonderful sensitivity—and the VSO under Bramwell Tovey didn't slouch either.

Some may have considered the highlight to be the *Symphony No. 4* by Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky. Formally his most original work, it was certainly his most tortured, written right after his disastrous marriage exploded.

It's a long piece at some 45 minutes and a wonderful one, and the performance came right up to it with some of the finest playing I've ever heard from the VSO—saturated with colour, balanced in all sections and precise in some of the trickier metres, such as the ones in the first movement.

Freighted with a feeling of destiny, it wasn't a festive thing for a season-opener, but who cared?

The other piece was a new one by Scott Good, the orchestra's new composer-in-residence. It was called *Blues 'n Riff—The Spectacular Tale of Katy Caboose*. Sound dorky? Think again. There was nothing childish about it. It was as skillfully scored as a Maurice Ravel, full of a George Gershwin-like feeling in its harmonies, fun and approachable without being condescending. The VSO finally has what seems like a real resident composer.

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