

South Florida CLASSICAL REVIEW

A night of nostalgia at the Broward Center with Judd and the Symphonia

By Lawrence Budmen



The Broward Center's "Classical With a Twist" series opened Thursday night at the Amature Theater with a program of works by Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms featuring the Symphonia Boca Raton under the direction of James Judd. In many ways the evening was reminiscent of the 1990's when Judd was frequently on the podium next door at the larger Au Rene concert hall, leading the now-defunct Florida Philharmonic. And, indeed, there were some former Philharmonic players in the orchestra. (Judd currently is director of ensembles in Israel, Slovakia and South Korea.)

There was some fine music-making as well as a somewhat disappointing soloist Thursday night. The opening chords of Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture were forceful and strongly accented. After an introduction taken at a measured pace, Judd whipped up a dramatic frenzy in the ensuing allegro. Ensemble sonority was full bodied with the strings precise and the tricky horn parts accurately rendered.

In pre-performance comments, Judd noted that the Urtext edition of Schubert's Symphony No. 4 in C minor ("Tragic") has detailed markings of dynamics and expressive emphasis that rival Mahler's scores for specificity. This work of the 19-year-old Schubert, never performed in his lifetime, is replete with drama as well as the profusion of melody that is the essence of all of Schubert's music. The Adagio molto introduction was superbly shaped and reached an emotional depth that clearly defined the symphony's title. A taut and stormy Allegro vivace was topped by a coda taken at a whirlwind clip.

Although there was drama and intensity in the central episode, Judd's tempo in Andante was far too slow, and the music tended to lose pulse and flow. There was ample power in the fierce Menuetto, with twists of thematic lines and dynamics emphatically underlined. Judd phrased the trio section gracefully with the playing taking on chamber-like ensemble precision. Nicely gauged contrasts of darkness and light abounded in the final Allegro. All credit to Judd for a worthy revival of this too rarely played score.

Jan Mráček was soloist in Brahms' Violin Concerto in D Major on the program's second half. Yet the Czech violinist's performance was more efficient than distinguished. Mráček tended to favor lyricism over fire. His tone was rather slender and his tempos sometimes precipitously slowed to a crawl. In the first movement's more virtuosic passages, Mráček's sound bordered on coarseness and his intonation wavered in the cadenza.

The expansive Adagio fit Mráček's style better. He brought a soaring line to the haunting main theme, beautifully supported by Judd's broad tempo. Like much of his performance, the Allegro giocoso finale was too small in scale, lacking that extra touch of distinctive bravura. Judd led a surging accompaniment that vividly emphasized a strong Brahmsian undercurrent from the lower strings.

Instead of the originally scheduled *Mazurek* by Dvorak, Mráček played an unaccompanied version of Fritz Kreisler's *Recitativo and Scherzo Caprice* as an encore. This proved more sympathetic material for the young violinist. Kreisler's sudden tempo changes and pyrotechnical tricks were well accounted for.

The concert drew an almost full house which bodes well for the new series. Hopefully Judd will be involved with some future presentations. It was good to hear his fine leadership again on a South Florida podium.

The Broward Center's "Classical With a Twist" series continues with the Amernet String Quartet playing works by Piazzolla, Schulhoff, Korngold, Britten, Barber, Beethoven and Gardel 8 p.m. January 12, 2017, browardcenter.org

Posted in [Performances](#)