

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

## Philadelphia Orchestra adds intensity to the familiar

*David Patrick Stearns - March 19, 2012*

For the umpteenth time, the Philadelphia Orchestra played Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3 ("Scottish") - one of those perfect, tidy pieces by this Biedermeier-era icon, one that characterizes storms, landscapes, and local color of Scotland from a safe, symphonic distance. Usually.

Every so often, the music is encouraged to burst beyond the frames that the composer so meticulously constructed - a feat accomplished by the excellent guest conductor Gianandrea Noseda on Friday at the Kimmel Center.

The usual scene painting can reduce the symphony to postcard music. But that element was only the starting point for Noseda. More important - and more than in any performance I've ever heard - Noseda harnessed the piece's form in ways that captured the passion behind Mendelssohn's rigor. Also significant was his use of the Philadelphia Orchestra sound: It was too dark to be comfortable, which is not to be taken for granted considering that Mendelssohn did not include lower brass in his scoring.

Rhythms had so much urgency that the folksy passages never lapsed into cuteness. When the fanfarelike passage arrived in the slow movement, it felt like a stone monument in a weather-beaten castle ruin that survives centuries through sheer insistence. Here lay the heart of the piece. The Philadelphia Orchestra played as if possessed. The audience responded similarly.

Rossini's William Tell Overture was similarly rehabilitated. For all its familiarity, the piece pioneered the idea of an opera overture as a tone poem of sorts. Instead of playing down the descriptiveness as in Mendelssohn, Noseda played up those qualities to great effect, starting with the opening cello solo, which was played with a solid sense of pulse.

Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1 featured Juliette Kang, the orchestra's first associate concertmaster, and the gossamer delicacy of her playing was immediately captivating.

But when the composer resorts to pithy, sequential repetition, Kang did not drive the piece so much as she pursued it, which lessened the charismatic possibilities of her performance. The final movement was curiously slow; the dreamy first-movement music returned with less sense of arrival. But lyricism is what counts the most here, and that is what she delivered.