

Sondra Radvanovsky headlines TSO concert: Review

By John Terauds - Apr 12, 2012



The Toronto Symphony Orchestra treated a full Roy Thomson Hall to a satisfying and memorable evening of high vocal and orchestral drama on Wednesday night.

The concert's headliner was Caledon-based soprano Sondra Radvanovsky, making her long-overdue Toronto Symphony debut.

She came with two signature arias that highlighted her powerful, dramatic voice, and even more potent ability to imbue every note and every phrase with meaning and purpose: "Merce, dilette amiche" (Thank you, dear friends) from *I vespri siciliani*, by Giuseppe Verdi; and the "Letter Scene," from Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*.

Radvanovsky's performance was so fine that it made one wish that there were two or three more substantial arias to fill the program.

Hopefully, this was but the first of many more concert visits with the TSO.

It should be difficult for any orchestra to compete with the sheer artistic wattage of a soloist like Radvanovsky. But, thanks to visiting Italian conductor Gianandrea Nosedà, the musical fireworks continued even when the diva was not on stage.

Radvanovsky's arias were complemented by expertly shaped Act III ballet music from the Parisian score to Verdi's opera *Macbeth*, and by a better-than-jaunty Polonaise from *Onegin*.

The real instrumental magic came after intermission, with a devastatingly moving performance of Tchaikovsky's often-programmed *Symphony No. 6* — his passionate, 45-minute swan song, premiered a few days before his death in 1893.

Nosedà's shaping of Tchaikovsky's voluptuous musical phrases was so strong, one felt like reaching out to caress their contours.

The maestro was also a deft manager of silence as well as sound.

Despite a couple of ragged moments during the first half, the orchestra was every bit Nosedà's equal in the *Symphony*. With deep, strong work from the strings and gorgeous balance from the brass, the *Symphony's* *Finale* became a *cri de coeur* to rival the most tragic moments on any opera stage.

It was a glorious moment of catharsis so precious in any concert hall.