
>> Drama Urge



Andrew Staube, courtesy of the artist.

BSO All-Beethoven

Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore, MD
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Maestro Cabellé-Domenech together with the pianist Andrew Staube and the BSO certainly delivered the goods in last night's provocative concert at Strathmore. If they made the old sound somewhat new - it was not your father's or even your grandfather's Beethoven - thank heavens for that. The program offered a mid-career cross-section of the composer's sunnier, optimistic moods, not "fate knocking at the door."

The energetic conductor came out swinging with a crisp interpretation of the *Fidelio Overture*, pounding the orchestra at times, the better to set up the softer passages of the short intro and segue to the featured artist. His expressive manner set the evening's tone: quick, forceful tempi interspersed with long drawn out, slower and quieter sections.

Mr. Staube is billed as a virtuoso performer and those talents were in ample supply in the *Piano Concerto No. 3*. With economy of movement, the pianist ranged across the keyboard providing clear and satisfying arpeggios repeatedly, when he wasn't nailing chord clusters. The first movement's theme played like a cat and mouse game, the orchestra and piano alternating reciprocal passages. Mr. Staube's cadenza was the highlight of the concert (if not season) for me and doubtless the audience. You could have heard a pin drop during the several mesmerizing minutes. He played the *Largo* with delicacy and occasionally surprisingly forceful phrasing, concluding with a show-stopping *Rondo*.

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The *pièce de résistance* "Pastoral" felt like a well-made play - tight structure, complications, and unexpected ending - with a superb ensemble cast. The Maestro shaped an exquisite interpretation that was layered and well balanced, allowing the sections and soloists to emerge almost organically. If you've ever wondered what 3D audio effects sound like, where a recording has a distinct spatial quality, this one was it, and it was live, not Digitex! The programmatic themes followed with clarity, movement by movement, though the final sections, played through, left a somewhat perplexing cadence for the attendees to ponder. The slow fadeout would be the last of the evening which ended not with a bang, but a whisper. Hear, hear!