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[LITERARY ARTS](#)  
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# JACK NEAL'S MUSIC REVIEWS

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## Music Reviews

Sep 7, 2008 - Conductor Jeffrey Grogan, pianist Andrew von Oeyen and the Reno Philharmonic bring excitement to the orchestra's 40th season opener

By Jack Neal

'Tis the season to hire a new conductor, the orchestra's 40th season searching for its fourth conductor, and the Reno Philharmonic has just hit a home run with its first (of five) wannabe heirs to the Reno Phil podium. Conductor and music educator Jeffrey Grogan made his impressive debut Sunday afternoon at 4 (9/7/08) before a close-to-capacity audience at Reno's Pioneer Center.

Shrewd programming, skillful rehearsing (phantoms of the concert hall have a way of knowing) and an energized performance add up to a can-you-top-this live audition. Maestro Grogan's succinct comments from the podium, a dangerous precedent when not properly brought off (they were), were icing on the cake.

American music paved the way handsomely for what was to follow. And that's as it should be for an American orchestra. Following a thrilling rendering of our National Anthem (a superb standard for a country swamped in horrid show-off performances), Grogan cut loose for a dynamic presentation of American composer Frank Ticheli's "Postcard."

"Postcard" is a short (about five minutes) virtuoso piece with rambunctious, off-beat rhythms that showcases the orchestra's athleticism. Athleticism, in its musical sense, is a genuflect in the direction of dashing, impressive virtuosity. It's a terrific piece, lots of fun, new to these programs and a wonderful glimpse into a possible future mixed with the tried-and-true and the new.

Welcome back to pianist Andrew von Oeyen who was so exceptional last season when he debuted here playing Mendelssohn's G minor Piano Concerto. This time it's Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5, the noble "Emperor." Danger lurks with a work so well known. Never fear! Von Oeyen, in tandem with Grogan and an alert and musically well-groomed orchestra (I hasten to add the orchestra also looked grand), brings to it the kind of excitement that makes it fresh and new again.

At 28, von Oeyen has achieved superstar status as an international concert pianist. His approach to the "Emperor" is elegant without being effete, powerful without being overdone, rhapsodic – a hauntingly beautiful second movement – without any hint of schmaltz. Here is Beethoven's marvel of a concerto (aren't they all) with every note in place, every emotion explored, marinated (if you will) with the love for freedom which is at the soul of everything Beethoven wrote. The performance is sheer exhilaration.

Grogan's highly musical reading of Sibelius's Symphony No. 2 is as dramatic as it is driven. Obviously a conductor who knows what kind of sound he wants from an orchestra, Grogan is quite good at getting what he wants. The sound is rich and vibrant. The performance he gets is high in energy, with close attention to the ebb, flow and controlled outbursts of blazing brasses which punctuate the first movement.

The second movement, with its opening pizzicato walk, has the same attention to detail that marks all this maestro does. Yet, it's in no way deliberate. The fast "Vivacissimo" third movement is nicely paced, neither too fast nor too slow. The bridge to the finale is handled smoothly with just the right touch of breathless anticipation. The brasses are burnished, the woodwinds sparkling, the strings lush, the percussion (timpanist Robert Lightfoot) appropriately supportive. A calm nobility gives way to a heroic defiance that gives the Sibelius its patriotic ring. Then, at last, it's the full glory of the symphony's final D major chords and a resolution of thrillingly realized fulfillment by way of majestic, often stormy ideas.

It's a triumphant, moving season opener (two standing ovations) that strongly suggests more exciting things to come.

The concert will repeated Tuesday (September 9) at 7:30 p.m.

All regular-season Reno Philharmonic subscription concerts are played at the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts, 100 South Virginia Street, Reno, Nevada. The orchestra's next pair of concerts will be Sunday, October 19 at 4 p.m. and Tuesday, October 21 (2008) at 7:30 p.m. With conductor Rebecca Miller and violinist Maia Cabeza. Featuring Pierre Jalbert's Chamber Symphony, Alexander Glazunov's Concerto for Violin, Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, the "Eroica." For information call 775-323-6393, or go on line at renophil.com.

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