

Celebrating a
40 Year
CAREER

— Dickran — **ATAMIAN**

PRESS CLIPPINGS

PERFORMANCE ACCLAIM:

Critic: Joe Pronenchen

Source of Review: Connecticut Post

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.CONNPOST.COM/](http://www.connpost.com/)

Date of Review: November 1, 1994

Critical Acclaim:

The Greater Bridgeport Symphony Orchestra opened its 49th season at the Klein Memorial Saturday evening with a performance peppered with thrilling moments. It was not only anticipated but quite appropriate since the program's themes and title was "Classical Thrillers."

Under the astute, inventive baton of musical director-conductor Gustav Meier, the GBSO seems to get stronger every year, improving even in areas where it seems to have reached a pinnacle, whether in tone, emotive effectiveness, or even versatility and ensemble ability.

In fact, this ensemble ability was testified to rather indirectly and unintentionally by Meier himself, when he introduced one of the selections. Explaining that Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor" was originally written for the organ and later arranged for orchestra by Stokowski, he added that it was the piece by the Phantom of the Opera in the film.

"We are now the organ," Meier said, referring to the GBSO, "and I'm the Phantom." How accurately that describes not just the Bach piece played then, but the total ensemble quality of the GBSO. They performed as one multi-layered instrument.

The showpiece for guest artist Dickran Atamian was Prokofiev's "Piano Concerto No. 3." "Energetic" would be an understated description for Atamian's playing. Given Prokofiev's musical philosophy and score, he furiously attacked the keyboard in a dazzling display of musical athleticism.

For the finale, the GBSO picked up Meier's underlying sense of wit when they donned masks for the lavishly emotional selection from Broadway's recent "Phantom of the Opera." It was the kind of unexpected touch that always adds the extra dash to the GBSO's esprit de corps.

Critic: William S. Goodfellow

Source of Review: Deseret News

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.DESERETNEWS.COM/](http://www.deseretnews.com/)

Date of Review: July 1, 1996

Critical Acclaim:

The last time I heard pianist Dickran Atamian in recital, a dozen years ago at the Museum of Fine Arts, I called it "a series of super brilliant, super fast and super hard performances that tended to overpower both the audience and the music."

Well, maybe it was the more expansive acoustic, or maybe one of us has mellowed a bit. But with one exception that was not the case with his program Saturday at the Temple Square Assembly Hall.

Oh. things were still brilliant - indeed, one of the most brilliant "Scarbos" (from Ravel's "Gaspard de la Nuit") I have ever heard. Nor were they particularly slow. Witness the precipitous opening of Bach's "Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue," here taken at a tempo that suggested the furies were after him.

Yet within this volatile, often mercurial conception there was an enormous range of feeling and color, whether in the liquid harmonic explorations of the Fantasy - in which every note was crystal clear - or the ringingly playful but ultimately purposeful Fugue, in which the trills became very much a part of the whole.

No less enlivening was his Schubert, here the Op. 164 Sonata in A minor. To be sure, the opening Allegro was hardly *ma non troppo* ("but not too much"), as the composer directs. But even at Atamian's driving tempo, there was a lyricism that carried over to the Allegro (an early form of the "Wings" theme), with its glancing hesitations and lightly bittersweet air.

After this came "Gaspard," even more compelling than I remember it being in 1984, when I judged it the finest thing on the program. Here it was that and more, capturing the music's nightmarish quality on every page, from the nocturnal shimmer of "Ondine" to the ominous quiet of "Le Gibet," the tolling B flats of the gallows bell hauntingly intoned.

Even more menacing was "Scarbo," again volatile and precipitous as it brought the malevolent dwarf throbbingly to life before building to a magnificent climax.

This was followed, somewhat provocatively, by Falla's "Fantasia Betica." I say provocatively because this piece has always seemed to me to owe something to "Scarbo." (In this regard, it may be worth remembering that "Gaspard" was inspired by, and premiered by, the Catalan pianist Ricardo Vines.)

Here, however, those likenesses were often obliterated in an even more hard-driven performance, in which Falla's careful balancing of light and shade frequently wilted beneath the hot Spanish sun.

The result was that the music, for all its metallic glint, actually lost something in rhythmic cohesion, as nearly everything yielded to Atamian's emphasis on its dissonance and its cascading runs.

So once again the piece was overwhelmed, as was the audience. But to judge from the ovation, the latter didn't seem to mind at all.

Critic: Bruce Arthur Glazer

Source of Review: Deseret News

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.DESERETNEWS.COM/](http://www.deseretnews.com/)

Date of Review: March 9, 1997

Critical Acclaim:

To: Mr. Dickran Atamian

Dear Maestro,

I met you briefly after your magnificent recital at the Annenberg Theater in Palm Springs yesterday. It was the third time I had seen you perform, and as had been the case on two other occasions, I was floored.

Since speaking to you that afternoon, I decided that I was, after all, sufficiently ignorant to be a critic so, later that evening I penned a free-lance review [Below] of your performance and submitted it to the Desert Sun newspaper. As it turns out, the Desert Sun will not publish reviews of one-time-only events! One wonders how they would have handled the attack on Pearl Harbor? I include it here for your review.

I eagerly await your recordings of the Tchaikovsky and the Katchaturian concerti, and I hope that you will consider the Bartok cycle some time soon.

Respectfully Yours,
Bruce Arthur Glazer

Dickran Atamian at the Annenberg

Beginning with the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in d-minor S.903 of J.S. Bach, it was as though he had intoned the first note before he was even seated. Such was the fierce intensity of Dickran Atamian's brilliant presence here at the Annenberg Theater Sunday afternoon.

The balance of the program itself was perfection. The aforementioned Bach was followed by the Schubert sonata in a-minor, Op 164, with its' wonderful diatonic deceptiveness which nevertheless made wonderful chromatic excursions. Atamian's controlled and altogether idiomatically expressive playing of it was like a fortifying cordial of a fine Kirshwasser before plunging into the exhaustions of the Liszt "Les Jeux d'eau a la Villa d'Este", a composition which clearly presaged the scintillating "impressionist" pieces that followed intermission.

Ravel's "Gaspard de la Nuit", "Ondine", "Le Gibbet" and "Scarbo" were handled by Atamian in the manner of a true twentieth century master, who wove both physically and tonally through their sumptuous and rigorous demands while successfully avoiding any inclination to "prettiness". At the conclusion of the Ravel the audience was moved to stand and when the "Bravos" ceased Atamian wowed us with a stunningly "pianistic" presentation of Manuel da Falla's "Fantasia Baetica". At the insistence of the audience Atamian was brought back for an encore, delivering the soothing balm of a Rachmaninoff Prelude

It has been nearly six-years since this magnificent artist has graced our valley, this reviewer can still remember the stellar performance of the Prokofiev 3rd. Concerto at the McCallum on that visit, and his following recital at the Annenberg where he demonstrated his mastery of the Romantic repertoire. Let's not let another six-year lapse before enjoining this "luminance" to return to our valley.

Critic: William W. Starr

Source of Review: The State

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.THESTATE.COM/](http://www.thestate.com/)

Date of Review: October 1997

Critical Acclaim:

If the USC football team were the school's symphony orchestra, it would be undefeated.

There'd be no boos, only loud applause.

And instead of threatening to impeach the coach, they'd be signing him to a lifetime contract.

So let's move the USC Symphony and "coach" Donald Portnoy out of the Koger Center and into Williams-Brice for a while, huh?

Just an idea, though it sounds better the more you listen to conductor Portnoy's very fine student musicians, who rolled through a program of Wagner, Dvorak and Grieg at the Koger Thursday evening.

Once again, they didn't play like student. For much of their concert, they displayed a maturity and technical ability that continues to surprise and please.

The brief concert-opener, Wagner's Prelude to Act 3 of "Lohengrin," offered a hint of what was to follow: focused, well-played musicianship at the service of the composer.

In Dvorak's Eighth Symphony, a much more substantial and demanding score, they faced a stern task. The symphony is strongly rhythmic yet with a profound Czech soul at its core. To play the notes - is not all that's necessary for success. A high level of expressive lyricism is essential.

Portnoy and his instrumentalists supplied this to a degree beyond expectations for a student orchestra in the Adagio and the Scherzo, finding a warmth and lilt to Dvorak's wonderfully fresh music. There was a fierce energy about the final movement which soared to an explosive ending.

Many an orchestra of professional caliber would be jealous of this kind of spontaneous, attractive performance.

Soloist Dickran Atamian closed the concert with a rousing performance of the Grieg "Piano Concerto in A Minor." Winner of the prestigious Naumburg Prize in 1975, Atamian knows his way around this piece, and while he has plenty of bravura gestures - his left leg seems almost to have a life of its own - he also has the technique to back it up.

He played this score with remarkable articulation and thoughtful shading, never succumbing to mere pounding. There was nothing routine about his performance, brilliant without being flashy, lyric without becoming self-conscious. He and the orchestra weren't always as one at moments in the concerto, but here the whole was definitely greater than its parts.

The cumulative effect of the performance was most impressive with Atamian a lively, imaginative interpreter enthusiastically supported by the orchestra.

Critic: John L. Allen

Source of Review: The Muskegon Chronicle

Source URL: [HTTP://MU.MLIVE.COM/NEWS/INDEX.SSF?ACROSS_THE_STATE#MUSKEGON](http://mu.mlive.com/news/index.ssf?across_the_state#muskegon)

Date of Review: November 15, 1997

Critical Acclaim:

Friday night's concert by the West Shore Symphony Orchestra began very auspiciously -both times. Yes, it began twice: banging pipes backstage somewhere caused maestro Murray Gross to lay down his baton a short minute into the opening number. The music stopped, he disappeared off stage, and came back shortly after and started over again. He later apologized, but explained that the noise from offstage was too annoying to be allowed to ruin the whole concert. (Was it Frauenthal reconstruction workers working overtime?)

But both times it was clear from the very first notes that we were in for a full, rich sound - all the more pleasant after the chamber sound at the last concert - also pleasant, in its own way. Still, the athleticism of Friday's performance was invigorating. It was also doubly satisfying for sounding well rehearsed from beginning to end. Sometimes, when there's a blockbuster number at the end - with soloist, as was the case Friday night - with soloist, as was the case Friday night - the rest of the program can sound like one more rehearsal might have helped.

But even the short opener, Grieg's First Symphonic Dance (in G Major), was full-bodied and extremely satisfying. The Symphony No. 1 by Sibelius, which occupied the rest of the first half of the program, was even more fulfilling. Sibelius is the master of infinite yearning, of melodic lines and harmonic progressions that capture a strenuous longing, only to burst at last into passionate climaxes. If this is even more true of his 2nd Symphony, it is interesting to see how it is foretold in the First.

Sibelius is also master of the musical depiction of that cold, northern clime that marked the whole program (from Norway to Finland to Russia). Inside the tremulous yearning of his music is something austere and taut - a muscular tension that can, by turns, be very graceful. And so it was Friday night at the Frauenthal with the WSSO and conductor Gross.

But the real kinetic energies were still to come after intermission. Dickran Atamian, as soloist, tore into Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto in B-Flat Minor with both fists. He scooped great handfuls of sound from his instrument and flung them very vigorously about the hall.

He managed, quite literally, to work up a considerable sweat. Several times, when he had a few measures break, he would mop not only his brow but the piano keys and the piano itself with a white handkerchief. As though to make up for the delay caused by the second start to the Grieg, the Tchaikovsky flew by at a heart-stopping pace. But neither the soloist nor the booming, thundering conclusion of the concerto was matched by thunderous applause - and an instant standing ovation.

Critic: Ann Ker

Source of Review: The State Journal-Register

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.SJ-R.COM/](http://www.sj-r.com/)

Critical Acclaim:

Sheer energy! Dickran Atamian was dynamite on the piano bench!

Did it make a difference in the music?

The answer was a resounding "Yes!" as the Illinois Symphony Orchestra presented the young soloist in Camille Saint-Saens' "Piano Concerto No. 2" at the Sangamon Auditorium Saturday night.

He strode onstage, sat down, wiped his hands on a handkerchief and with no warning at all, tossed it aside and dived into the piano. The concerto is an unusual one in that it begins with a section for piano alone, with the orchestra entering after the first theme is established.

It is an unrelenting work for the soloist, and I don't think I have ever heard it played that fast or with such excitement. He almost made the piano jump off the stage. The result was a vitality in the music that is a rare and precious thing. So many soloists are content just to dazzle you with their virtuosity, and there's no doubt that Atamian filled that bill, but he went so much further. He poured his whole being into that music, and there wasn't a soul in the auditorium that was left untouched.

Kenneth Kiesler, music director of the ISO, introduced Atamian at Concert Comments, and he proved to be a refreshingly honest musician who complained about how hard the music was. "Practicing always goes well, it's just when I have to play that it's kind of a nightmare," he said with a chuckle. "I got married in August, so that helps, but she doesn't like to hear me complain."

He and Kiesler also had a fascinating dialogue about just what makes a musician have "something to say," concluding that one must go beyond the physical demands of the work before one can express the music.

The concerto is improvisatory in style, with the opening movement an "Andante sostenuto" instead of the usual "allegro." When asked what made it so difficult, Atamian answered that it is "technically awkward, with lots of leaps, skips and fast 32nd notes that just keep going for pages and pages."

I tried shutting my eyes, to see if the music was as exhilarating without the visual aspect, but he was so riveting to watch that I couldn't keep them shut for long.

It took a lot to overshadow the two "Nocturnes" by Claude Debussy, for they were absolutely exquisite. Kiesler brought out every nuance in the ethereal "Nuages" (Clouds). Debussy was an impressionist - his music sounds like Claude Monet's paintings look like - an artistic, poetic expression of coloristic tone painting. S. Blake Duncan's many English horn solos were simply gorgeous.

The second nocturne, "Fetes," was a picture of a festival day, complete with chattering people, lively melodies, and most interesting, the approach of a marching band in the middle of the movement. Soft timpani, then muted trumpets that grew gradually louder as the musicians drew near were a perfect illustration of Debussy's incredible pictorial orchestration. These works required a larger orchestra than usual, complete with two harps that had a stunning solo moment in the piece.

Completing Kiesler's mental image of the nocturnes (night music, a.k.a. dreams) was Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1 in G Minor which is subtitled "Winter Dreams." Kiesler spoke about composer and their first symphonies: "What is in the composer's mind when he begins to write? What does he think he has to say that is different, and how will he do it?"

This one is not often heard, but has some glimpses of the Tchaikovsky-to-be of the later symphonies and especially the ballets in it. One hears hints of the not-yet-written "Nutcracker" in places, and although the work lacks the expertise of symphonies 4,5 and 6, it is lovely music. After the fire of the Saint-Saens, however, it seemed a bit ponderous, especially the final movement.

Critic: Ted Hoffman

Source of Review: The Ledger

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.THELEDGER.COM/](http://www.theledger.com/)

Date of Review: November, 28 1997

Critical Acclaim:

Revelry and emotion took control as dynamo Antonia Joy Wilson took the helm of the Imperial Symphony Orchestra for an eclectic and difficult evening of music.

Wilson, the second of four conductors auditioning to take over the orchestra next season, provided a stark contrast to the first tryout, John Whitney. Where Whitney was contained and light in manner, the demonstrative Wilson practically created a hole in the podium.

Handsome, bristling with nervous energy, swiping hair behind her ears with her free hand as she conducted, Wilson by sheer force of will and style kept the musicians together during the rigorous, eccentric passages.

The famous bacchanal from Camille Saint-Saens' "Samson and Delilah" --climaxing in the whirling, horn-driven dance of sheer decadence --opened the concert like a burglar using dynamite to open a safe.

The whole piece, actually, is a description of drinking too much alcohol: playful and seductive at first, then relaxed and romantic as the brain cells surrender, and finally, wildly uninhibited as the reveling intensifies.

Throughout, Wilson's baton moved strongly and clearly. She showed a deft communication with the players, despite just a week of intensive rehearsal.

With Mozart's "Piano Concerto No. 23," order and civility were restored. Cheerful, even gay in the first and third movements, the piece was a showcase for guest pianist Dickran Atamian.

There's a charming informality to Atamian. When he wasn't playing, he'd wipe his hands on his knees, shake his right hand to keep it loose, or rock restlessly on the bench.

And then he'd enter with the most precise, sensitive technique. Embellishing bright themes introduced by woodwinds and strings, Atamian fingers flowed over the keyboard, periodically pausing to massage a key as though to coax vibrato out of it.

The sweetly melancholy second movement, with a wistful clarinet standing out, leads to a fun feisty final movement. It's here that the concerto provides a real spotlight for virtuosity, and Atamian tirelessly rode the keys, trading themes and colors with the orchestra.

Wilson and the pianist had a wonderful rapport; after the concert, Atamian raved about her, and this is a man who's performed with heavyweights such as the Cleveland, New York and Detroit symphonies.

After intermission, Wilson and the orchestra attempted, and nearly succeeded, to blow the roof off The Lakeland Center's Youkey Theatre.

Gustav Mahler's long, quirky and impassioned "Symphony No. 1" was a challenging test for conductor and musicians. Wilson turned frequently kinetic. Her left arm reached out more and more to the players, guiding them, commanding them, beseeching them.

The sustained opening chord was riveting: You could hear the hush in the audience as the strings created a nearly breathless pastoral mod, after which woodwinds entered delicately as waking birds.

After a gentle melody carried by the cellos, which were excellent all evening, the movement builds with fanfare in the brass. From there, through the joyful peasant dance of the second movement and even the lethargic "Frere Jacques" the piece keeps pushing the musicians to their limits.

The strings worked hard, chasing Mahler's swift and elusive runs; it looked at times as though they were trying frantically to saw their instruments in half. For the most part, they kept pace; a few times, they slipped out of unison or faded under the barrage of notes.

No less under attack were the horns, forced to the peaks of their range. And consistently outstanding were the percussionists, who got a real workout on practically every piece of equipment imaginable short of cannon and spoons.

There was a moment in the brilliant, difficult final movement, in which the trumpets led the slow charge to a new key that was absolutely thrilling.

While not without its glitches --Wilson and Atamian couldn't quite agree on the same tempo at times and Mahler gave the orchestra fits -- this concert was overall a rousing success.

Critic: Patty Aakhus

Source of Review: Courier Press

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.COURIERPRESS.COM/](http://www.courierpress.com/)

Date of Review: April 19, 1998

Critical Acclaim:

The audience at the Evansville Philharmonic Orchestra's Classics concert in temporary quarters at Bethel Temple was swept away Saturday night by the brilliance of Khachaturian, and especially Dickran Atamian's inspired performance of his Piano Concerto.

The orchestra, led by maestro Alfred Savia, was in fine form. The program opened with Khachaturian's well-known "Three Pieces from Gayane," featuring an exciting rendition of the bombastic, explosive "Sabre Dance." Savia conducted the "Dance of the Rose Maidens" with grandeur and playfulness, just the right light touch. There was good depth in the violins. The "Lullaby," with muted sweet strings, was delicate, exotic and full of longing, reminiscent of Borodin's "Steppes from Central Asia."

Khachaturian's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra opened in the midst of crisis - with the right mix of power and brittleness in Atamian's attack. He moved quickly into high gear, a gorgeous, passionate sound, pure Prokofiev.

The snake charmer theme was appropriately lateral, sinuous and brisk, full of exciting rhythms perfectly executed by ensemble and soloist. Atamian burned up the Steinway with incredible arpeggios, all pyrotechnics but brilliant phrasing and dynamics.

This is a piece in which piano and orchestra are well matched; the ensemble does not merely support but mirrors the complex drama and relentless tension in the piano part. The cadenza and coda following were simply thrilling.

Atamian's marvelous style, musicality, phrasing and passion were showcased in the second movement. The work has the sensuality and nostalgic power of traditional folk music in a modern context - angularity, dissonance, repetition, fierce rhythms. Atamian's marvelous style, musicality, phrasing and passion were hallmarks of an outstanding performance. And the orchestra cooked.

The audience was on its feet seconds after Savia lowered his baton, giving numerous ovations to orchestra, conductor and virtuoso Dickran Atamian.

The final work on the program was well chosen to complement the Khachaturian fireworks - Cesar Franck's "Symphony in D Minor."

The cello opening was lovely, fine textured, receding and advancing, a sombre foundation for the glorious cathedral of sound to come. Nobility, fine dynamics - and a good sense of ensemble pervaded the first movement.

Momentary loses of coordination - and flashes of uneven dynamics occurred occasionally in the second movement. Strings had good definition and a full sweet swelling sound.

The third movement featured superb cellos and English horn. At times the final theme seemed rushed, with an odd emphasis that rendered the phrase more dancelike (even jazz-like) than touched by impressionism.

The concert as a whole was sublime.

Critic: David Levinson

Source of Review: Long Beach Press-Telegram

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.PTCONNECT.COM/](http://www.ptconnect.com/)

Date of Review: June 8, 1998

Critical Acclaim:

After charter members had a sneak preview Saturday of the delights of the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra audience at the Terrace Theater got a preview of the music that will accompany the aquarium's tropical exhibit.

The concert - and the orchestra's current season - closed with a performance of Debussy's La Mer. As aquarium visitors view recreations of a coral lagoon and barrier reef, Debussy's tribute to a windswept ocean will play on a CD recorded by the orchestra.

The CD will include other watery works from Saturday's concert: Frank Bridge's conservative, melodic and handsomely played The Sea; Liadov's pretty The Enchanted Lake; and an orchestra arrangement of Debussy's piano prelude The Engulfed Cathedral.

That arrangement by Henri Busser, a turn-of-the-century French conductor, was authorized by Debussy. The idea of orchestrating the haunting prelude seems to make sense, but with the performance Saturday we learned why the result is never played: The original piano version sounds orchestral. Busser's version sounds lame.

Falletta's La Mer is a sunlit sea with no gray hours - well suited for its aquarium service. The orchestra played with assurance, and the CD should be able to hold its own with most recorded versions of the popular score.

It would not have surprised Debussy to learn that an old enemy of his, Camille Sain-Saens, triumphed in audience reaction when his second piano concerto became the second major work, along with La Mer at Saturday's concert.

Debussy's opinion of audiences was even lower than his opinion of Saint-Saens, and he would surely have attributed his rival's triumph to a lack of audience sensitivity.

La Mer got the standard standing ovation Long Beach audiences provide for any work that closes a concert noisily. But the audience gave a longer and more enthusiastic standing ovation to the Saint-Saens concerto.

While La Mer is great music and the concerto is not, Saint-Saens was considerably aided in the battle by his champion for the evening, pianist Dickran Atamian.

Atamian plays with dazzling speed and power. More, he does all this in the grand virtuoso style. His right arm flies to his side only to rise and attack the keyboard in another display of power.

Give Saint-Saens some credit. He was more interested in crowd control than in art, and he knew what works. He also knew about conductorial shortcomings, and he provided a score in which, from the very beginning, the pianist has ample unaccompanied opportunities to demonstrate subtle mastery along with emotional energy. Atamian seized them all.

Critic: Tammy Fareed

Source of Review: Grunion Gazette

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.GAZETTES.COM/](http://www.gazettes.com/)

Date of Review: June 11, 1998

Critical Acclaim:

A day that included three hours touring the new Aquarium of the Pacific followed by two hours and half hours listening to the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra perform music inspired by the sea should also have included a dose of Dramamine.

In tribute to the opening of the Aquarium, LBSO's final Classic Concert of the season featured five works about bodies of water. In an earlier interview, LBSO music director JoAnn Falletta had said the concert would have an impressionistic feel, and she was right. From Mendelssohn's "Hebrides Overture" to Liadov's "The Enchanted Lake" to Debussy's "La Mer" this music written to describe water suggested, well, water and lots of it.

Whether a sparkling sea, a tranquil lake, or a rippling moonlit shore, the concert buoyed the listener along gentle currents of violin, sweet breezes of flute and clarinet, undulating tempos and caressing harmonies. Booming timpani and crashing cymbals of foaming surf brought moments of alarm, but the lovely sould of

lapping waves always returned, floating away on a shining sea. It was an odd sensation, made somewhat surreal by having spent the day at the Aquarium. From the number of nodding heads around the auditorium, it appeared others were in a similar boat.

There was, however, an exception to the water theme. Like a volcanic island at its fiery birth, Saint-Saens's "Piano Concert No. 2" burst onto the stage midway through the concert at the hands of pianist Dickran Atamian, a short, rumped young man whose only tether to the ground turned out to be his pedal foot.

From the moment he sat at the piano, Atamian became the Tasmanian Devil. With most of his body parts flung into the air much of the time, seemingly oblivious of the audience but aware enough of Falletta, he addressed the piano as though it were an anvil and forge, playing the pyroclastic work with coarse, crashing virtuosity.

The Concerto's hand-blurring leaps and finger-tangling runs and trills were designed to display Saint-Saens' own legendary pianistic prowess. But Saint-Saens was a Frenchman with that certain French refinement, Atamian's answer to the work's demands was sheer savagery, his contact with the keyboard very nearly sadistic. Even his fluid agility showered the stage with sparks and embers.

It was a bit thrilling to realize how bluntly unafraid he was of that most intimidating of beasts, the Steinway concert grand. The piano itself, built for elegant sonorities, responded to Atamian's ferocity loudly but with its superb breeding intact, sounding as though it actually relished rough treatment after the years of pampered performances. The only thing louder was the audience's roaring ovation.

Critic: Robert Workmon

Source of Review: Winston-Salem Journal Now

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.JOURNALNOW.COM/](http://www.journalnow.com/)

Date of Review: September 13, 1998

Critical Acclaim:

The 52nd season of the Winston-Salem Piedmont Triad Symphony opened last night at the Stevens Center with a concert of Romantic and 20th-century repertoire. The program featured pianist Dickran Atamian in Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 and guest conductor Bill McGlaughlin, who also led the orchestra in works by Carl Maria von Weber, Edward Elgar and his own Crooked Timber.

Weber's overture to the opera Euryanthe set the standard of performance for the evening with burnished and clean-string playing. The orchestra conveyed the emotional swings inherent in this music with near-flawless command of its technical requirements. The asymmetrical phrases, the themes, a hallmark of Weber's arch-Romanticism, were played with such sustained energy that it struck an impression of natural balance.

If the Weber exhibited the wild world of early 19th-century Romanticism to a tee, then Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto reveals 20th-century revolution with exhilarating clarity and force.

Atamian was all business when he walked across the stage to the piano. He had arrived in Winston-Salem only the night before this concert, and with so little rehearsal, what happened next was a minor miracle.

The orchestral introduction, clarinets and strings, opened like a flower. Atamian then set out on a viscerally charged ride through Prokofiev's score. McGlaughlin's conducting and heads-up playing by the orchestra kept the piece from becoming a runaway train as Atamian focused on wringing every possible nuance and decibel from the piano. The sparse -but-appreciative audience couldn't help but applaud after the first movement.

After the intermission, McGlaughlin's Crooked Timber was played. The listenable piece shares traits with some of the most popular concert music by American composers: the spaciousness of Copland, the rhythmic drive of Bernstein. More than anything, it has a cinematic quality, a quality that conjures or accompanies something visual. Crooked Timber is solidly crafted music that needed to be well played, and it was.

The English horn solo that opens McGlaughlin's work has a lot in common with the wistful soundscape of Elgar's Enigma Variations, and, indeed, Crooked Timber and Enigma share moments that seem related on some level.

It was worth attending this concert just to hear Enigma. Elgar's magnificent score received a glowing performance last night. The brass sounded warm and powerful; the winds played with a lightness and clarity that contrasted with the deeply glowing string sound in a most satisfying way.

Critic: Emiliano Allende

Source of Review: El Norte de Castilla

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.NORTECASTILLA.ES/DIARIO/INDICE.HTML](http://www.nortecastilla.es/diario/indice.html)

Date of Review: November 4, 1998

Critical Acclaim:

The second concert of the season featured the excellent pianist of Armenian origin, Dickran Atamian. The other attractions (of this concert) were eclipsed by his wonderful performance of the piano concerto of another Armenian, Khatchaturian, celebrating the 20th anniversary of his death.

The concerto (the composition), full of spontaneity and optimism, flowed from the pianist with ease and generosity; demonstrating an excellent technique and above all an outstanding and well-communicated sensitivity, with a powerful sound on the chords in octaves in cascade form in the first movement. The interpretation of the cadenza in this movement was of a very high level. There was also time to display a fine performance by the bass clarinet, who explored dark corners in the sound of the low notes in the second movement, introducing the piano, who exposed a delicious melody of Caucasian origin. The classical finale demonstrated to advantage the tonal advances of Post-Romanticism and served to highlight the performances of the soloist and the orchestra, who contributed to the grand success of Dickran Atamian. In addition, the soloist presented us with a prelude of Rachmaninoff and with the Ondine from Gaspard de la nuit of Ravel. He touched perfection in both encores, above all for the exquisite clarity of the soft passages, which he conveyed to an auditorium, which remained in meaningful silence.

Critic: Bob Barrett

Source of Review: The Knoxville News-Sentinel

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.KNOXNEWS.COM/](http://www.knoxnews.com/)

Date of Review: November 20, 1998

Critical Acclaim:

Kirk Trevor, the Knoxville Symphony Society's artistic director and conductor of the Symphony and Chamber orchestras, brought an energetic interpretation to all three of the featured works Thursday night at the Tennessee Theatre.

And Dickran Atamian, the featured piano soloist, was nothing if not energetic.

Assuming they all have some energy left, the concert will be repeated at 8 tonight.

Those who arrived a bit early were treated to a pre-concert serenade by a string quartet made up of Oak Ridge High School sophomores.

The group, SpyreRydge, even has its own Web site, and two of them play with the Knoxville Symphony Youth Orchestra under Sande MacMorran.

The concert opened with Claude Debussy's three-movement "La Mer".

The opening bars are so soft that some in the audience did not realize the concert was under way. It was the only time that the word "energetic" might have been inappropriate.

The second number, however, was almost too energetic. Trevor conducted Maurice Ravel's "La Valse," without the score in front of him - the better to have more room to use his entire body as a baton.

Trevor, of course, often throws himself totally into his conducting. There is seldom any doubt about what he is asking of his musicians.

By the end of "La Valse," however, he was leaping into the air demanding such volume from his players that the orchestra's tone quality suffered.

Atamian also played with an intensity that made one feel he had to rip the music from the piano in Johannes Brahms' "Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor."

Critic: Becky Ball

Source of Review: Oak Ridger

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.OAKRIDGER.COM/](http://www.oakridger.com/)

Date of Review: November 20, 1998

Critical Acclaim:

The Knoxville Symphony flooded the Tennessee Theatre Thursday night with tidal waves from Debussy's "La Mer," and then tried to dry out the auditorium with Ravel's barn-burning "La Valse." And those were just appetizers for the main course of Brahms, served up by Dickran Atamian, an honest-to-goodness gourmet cook, who also just happens to be an internationally acclaimed concert pianist. If Atamian's culinary talents are as fastidious as his playing, then we're talking five stars.

Drats, another great concert! What's a reviewer to do but rave?

And all raves puts one's credibility on the line. But a run-of-the-mill program is not likely to happen as long as Kirk Trevor is program director and conductor of the KSO.

This time he was a worthy champion of Brahms and the French Impressionistic style.

Claude Debussy's "La Mer" is more illusion than revelation, but the sense of mystery is as fascinating as its orchestration. The piece owes its ever-changing colors and unique textures to the ocean and to Debussy's fertile imagination. The evocative thing about it is the happy balance between exciting climaxes and tranquil musings. The KSO did some lovely shading with pianissimos evaporating like mist from a great reservoir of water.

In the Scherzo movement (The Play of the Waves) one could all but taste the salt, so atmospheric were the waves. Mood and rhythmic spasms took precedence over melody, as Debussy intended, and fragmented themes changed as often as the instrumentation. The undercurrent was choppy and capricious for awhile, long enough for us to warm to the novel tone colors splashing about.

We would have been quite happy to anchor there a bit longer, but Trevor was in tune with the composer and kept propelling the orchestra into the final movement (Dialogue of the Wind and Sea) where the orchestra literally played up a storm. This is one time you praise an orchestra for making waves. It took a lot of heaving for Trevor to pull such heavy barges of notes, and it took expansive conducting to whip them up to tidal-wave force. He succeeded admirably.

There's a sly wit and more than a sense of the macabre in Maurice Ravel's "La Valse," a double satire on the Viennese waltz and the First World War. The charm of this piece is its sharply etched workmanship and instrumentation, beginning with a foggy kind of peace, captured delightfully here, and then developing into a war dance that gets meaner and more severe in its harmonies and rhythms.

The image the audience is supposed to see is a large hall where twirling couples waltz until they drop.

This music was a fandango and a half -- an "inescapable whirlpool" of exciting sounds. Trevor did away with a score on this one, and worked up such a frenzy from the orchestra it took bravery for him to intervene to stop them so abruptly.

Dickran Atamian played Johannes Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor like he's lived with it a long time. There was not a throw-away note in the entire piece. Atamian keeps his fingers close to the keys in perfect hand positions, and squeezes every drop of tone from the notes. When he pressed a key, gently or aggressively, there seemed to be a bottomless tone, and when he played forte, often holding his own against the orchestra, there was never a hint of banging thuds.

Atamian is a totally committed player, very intense and very immersed in the music. His rapt concentration brought some fantastic dividends such as quick-silver attacks and releases and idealized rubatos.

His phrasings went beyond musical, and there was something magical about his timing of accents. Every note and every expression was chiseled out as in portrait sculpture.

Atamian is not the easiest pianist for the audience to warm up to. He's fidgety and he keeps a large handkerchief busy wiping perspiration. But he and the music he's playing are one. He seems to be unaware of an audience, and chances are he would have played with the same passionate attention to detail, audience or no audience. Anybody that can get that much out of Brahms' fiercely demanding piano music can play their way into heaven as far as I'm concerned.

Let's talk about Atamian's basic technique. First, there's the spectacular dexterity of his fingers. Then there's the rotation of his hands, so impressive to watch because of their machine-like precision.

And how about melodies so seamless there are never any thumps? Speaking of seamless, his performance of this concerto was all of a piece. One didn't think in terms of movements, but rather a journey with changing scenic routes.

And finally we come to the matter of trills. Have you ever heard of carbonated ones? Well, think champagne and you'll get the image of the way his trills tingled in our ears.

The Brahms' concerto is a significant encounter between soloist and orchestra, and a tough one to hold together. Trevor and the KSO were right there on the money. The playing was heroic and

expressive, leaving the listeners with good final thoughts of classical-romantic, a nice way to wrap up after the memorable first half of French Impressionism.

Critic: Daniel Buckley

Source of Review: Tucson Citizen

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.TUCSONCITIZEN.COM/](http://www.tucsoncitizen.com/)

Date of Review: January 1999

Critical Acclaim:

If you like your Grieg with steel spikes, you've got to catch Dickran Atamian.

The piano soloist with the Tucson Symphony Orchestra drilled the familiar warhorse concerto so hard as to crack the keyboard ivory, thrilling a crowd of 1,400 at the Tucson Convention Center Music Hall last night.

A virtuoso showcase, the Grieg invites a bravura performance. But Atamian lit into it with blowtorch intensity, proving himself over and over with flawless technique at blinding speed. In the score's unaccompanied sections, the lush side of Atamian's artistry came through in soulful phrasing marked by elastic surges and crisp articulations. It may not be the Grieg you're used to, but it rocked!

The Scandinavian program began with Swedish composer Wilhelm Stenhammar's driving epic "Excelsior!" and ended with Finnish composer Jan Sibelius' most romantic symphony (No. 2). Both works showed the orchestra's strength and precision.

The Sibelius is a particularly tricky piece, with layers of superimposed rhythms and melodies, and a broad sonic palette. The TSO brass and percussion rose to thrilling heights throughout, and it was a great night for the strings as well, both whisper quiet and full tilt.

As for the interpretation, TSO music director George Hanson seemed to prefer speed over musicality. This is a piece that can be transcendental if allowed to breathe and unfold. And while the players zipped through it with ease, it ultimately sounded prodded in an uncomfortable way.

Critic: Richard Zoller

Source of Review: Sierra Vista Herald

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.SVHERALD.COM/](http://www.svherald.com/)

Date of Review: January 28, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

The Tucson Symphony is good, maybe even great. Several years ago I was able to compare them with the Phoenix Symphony, which was at that time, in my opinion, the better of the two. If I could make a similar comparison now, I'm not at all sure that my judgment would be the same.

The Tucson Symphony concert was very satisfying. The orchestra is in excellent form. Maestro George Hansen has trained the orchestra to be responsive and to play with blended sound and impeccable is most expressive, and the orchestra reads it well.

The first number, by William Steinhammar, was "Excelsior!" It is romantic music, the kind I used to pick for my conducting students because of its opportunities for detailed expression. It was pleasant music.

The guest artist, pianist Dickran Atamian, was as entertaining to watch as to hear. He plays with flair, with extravagant flourishes and intense emotion. He showed extreme self-confidence in choosing to play the Grieg A Minor Concerto.

The concerto is so well known that many artists have recorded it, so every time it is played there is a tendency to compare the performer with others. Atamian displayed ample expressiveness and technical capacity, though the more delicate passages, especially in the third movement, were a little heavy. Altogether it was an exciting presentation.

The final offering, Symphony No. 2 by Jean Sibelius, is very close to "pure" music. It is not a hymn to the composer's native land, like his tone poem "Finlandia," though there are hints of folk melodies and deeply felt patriotism. If one listened without trying to analyze, he would feel depressed by waves of beautiful music. Conductor Hansen and his orchestra treated the symphony with obvious respect. I must compliment them on their attention to expressive detail and on their "tutti" passages, which were so well balanced and blended as to make the ensemble sounds like a single wonderful instrument.

Several of the orchestra members have concertized independently in this area. Trombonist Tom Ervin, clarinetists John Denman and John Snavely, pianist Paula Fan, violinists Michael Fan, Anna Gendler, and Rollin Medcalf, and cellist Nelzimar Neves have all performed here or in Bisbee, and this list may be incomplete. We have a lot of good music available, though there are few opportunities to hear a 76-piece orchestra in our immediate vicinity. We should all be grateful for the rare event.

Now I'd like to talk about the Sierra Vista Symphony. The orchestra we heard in Buena PAC last Saturday night will give you an idea of our eventual goals for our own orchestra. Someone asked when we could expect our own string section to sound like that. There are a lot of obstacles to overcome, and I'll enumerate a few of them.

First, the Tucson Symphony had 48 string players. That's more than our entire orchestra. If we had a string section like that, and paid them the same as we pay members of our orchestra, it would cost us \$8,400 for strings alone, for each concert. Actually, it would be considerably more, since the Tucson Symphony pays higher wages to attract the better players. Not that our strings are all that bad. The section has improved with every concert, and our people are playing "over their heads."

Second, a 76-piece orchestra, other things being equal, will always sound better than an orchestra half that size. I could go on at some length, but that is enough to suggest that money is the indispensable element.

We on the Sierra Vista Symphony Board would like to see the orchestra grow in size and capability. We select music very carefully to suit our orchestration, and we take advantage of all our chances to borrow equipment without cost. So, far, we have achieved very good results, and are proud of our success.

Our supporters have so far given enough to keep us out of debt. Some have been very generous, but we cannot in all conscience ask them to make even greater contributions. If we could just persuade every small business and every family that enjoys classical music to invest in a basic level membership \$25 per year, we would be in good financial condition to expand.

In the meantime, though, the Sierra Vista Symphony is doing well. The upcoming Western Heritage concert on Feb. 19 was planned to complement the Cowboy Poetry and Music Festival. It will be played just after rather than just before the Festival, but will still fit well with the February activities. Our guest artist will be Dolan Ellis, Arizona's Official Balladeer. This will be the first time Ellis has

played with a symphony orchestra. Special orchestrations have been prepared by two professionals, Herb Gardner of New York City and Roger Bayes of Sierra Vista. Of course the orchestra will also play other music inspired by Western themes, such as John Williams' "Cowboy Fantasy" and Aaron Copland's "Rodeo."

As most people now know, Ellis is an excellent poet, composer and historian. He has researched the little-known legends and historical incidents in Arizona history to an extent that nobody else has ever done. His gift for poetry and melody has resulted in story ballads that are interesting, amusing and appealing.

Critic: Julia LaBua

Source of Review: Quad-City Times

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.QUADCITYTIMES.COM/](http://www.quadcitytimes.com/)

Date of Review: March 8, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

A magical combination of music, conductor and soloist came together Sunday afternoon at Centennial Hall, Rock Island, to help the Quad-City Symphony Orchestra give possibly its finest performance of the season.

The music included works by Berlioz, Brahms, Beethoven and Stravinsky; the conductor was David Wroe, one of the finalists for the QCSO's vacant music director position; and the soloist was pianist Dickran Atamian.

But none of those elements could have shone as brightly without the solid foundation provided by the Quad-City Symphony Orchestra.

It was the brass section, in particular, that dazzled this weekend, from its energetic, vital playing for Berlioz's "Overture" to "Beatrice et Benedict" to its incredible work in Beethoven's "Leonore" Overture No. 3." The ovation received after the latter was wholly deserved.

And so, for that matter, were the ovations received by Atamian, who was anything but boring to watch or to hear during his performance of Brahms' "Concerto No. 1 in D Minor for Piano and Orchestra."

The concerto opened with a lengthy introduction by the orchestra. Atamian rocked back and forth energetically while waiting for his cue. Again and again, his hands fluttered to the keys and away, moths drawn to a musical flame. At last, it was time for him to play, and he unleashed all that energy onto the piano with a controlled intensity that served the music well.

Reaching the end of a particularly intricate passage, Atamian's right hand struck the last note and rebounded off the keyboard as though propelled by an outside force. In a posture sure to strike horror in the hearts of finishing school graduates everywhere, he hunched over the keyboard with his forehead nearly to his hands, as if drawing the music from the instrument with his mind.

The intensity and exuberance with which Atamian and the orchestra played the first and third moments of the Brahms concerto were in marked contrast to the reflective, almost melancholy mood of the second movement.

Atamian's playing proved just as well suited to the quieter passages, though his expressive body language provided an intriguing counterpoint to the delicate placement of his fingers on the keys.

Directing all of this energetic, exciting performance was Wroe, the penultimate in the orchestra's series of guest conductors this year (the conductor of the April 10-11 finale concerts is Kate Tamarkin, who is not a candidate for the music director post).

Wroe, a native of Great Britain, is music director and conductor of the Westfield (N.J.) Symphony Orchestra, principal conductor of the Philharmonic Orchestra in Heidelberg, Germany, and music director of the Kansas City Camerata.

During the Concert Conversation beforehand, however, Wroe chose to eschew the usual biographical dissection in favor of giving the audience a short overview of what, exactly, a conductor does.

"The art of conducting itself looks rather complicated," Wroe said with an engaging smile. "But the basic principle is simple: While the violinists have their violins, and the trombonists have their trombones, the conductor's instrument is the orchestra."

"It's the conductor's job to galvanize the individual players' efforts and energies into a single unified ideal."

Wroe led the crowd through some basic four-and three-beat patterns to demonstrate. The best illustration came later during the concert, as Wroe threw his whole body into the gestures he used to communicate with the orchestra.

Critic: Julie Jensen

Source of Review: Quad-City Times

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.QUADCITYTIMES.COM/](http://www.quadcitytimes.com/)

Date of Review: March 8, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

Davenport - British-born guest conductor David Wroe took evident delight in showing off the full range of the Quad City Symphony Orchestra Saturday.

The Berlioz Overture to "Beatrice et Benedict" is of American Civil War vintage, but there's nothing fusty about it. Mr. Wroe seemed to sculpt the music with his baton, evoking a dulcet legato sound, shimmering violins and the walking rhythm of the string basses. When he asked for brass, they poured it on.

Piano soloist Dickran Atamian did the agony and the ecstasy bit waiting for the bombast of the first movement of the Brahms Concerto No. 1 in D Minor for piano and orchestra to let him into the act. When his moment came at last he played softly, building intensity and executing some fantastic trills.

Then Mr. Atamian was gloriously alone, and he really took off. The moods of the movements varied greatly, and so did the artist's style as he played them.

Following intermission, the orchestra played Beethoven's "Leonore" Overture No. 3, opening with a note that descended the scale, then swelled and ebbed. The violins were so soft that you thought you were imagining the sound, but then came the heroics - fortissimo percussion and brass.

Some glorious French horn notes, an off-stage trumpet call, and some fine flute and bassoon passages distinguished this piece. Everything about it was sharp and crisp, and it ended with a timpani roar.

Mr. Wroe definitely has a way with Stravinsky. He conducted the "Firebird" suite with elan, and the sections handed off the themes to each other flawlessly. He brought excitement to the "Infernal Dance of King Kastchei" and emphasized the Oriental beauty of the more familiar "Berceuse" and "Finale."

Critic: James Ross

Source of Review: The Miami Herald

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.HERALD.COM/](http://www.herald.com/)

Date of Review: March 10, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

James Brooks-Bruzzese and the Symphony of the Americas played their best Mozart yet at Broward Center for the Performing Art's Amaturio Theater Thursday night.

The group began the season with a spotty Symphony No. 32 in G major, turning things around notably at their all-Mozart program last January, when Anton Nel played a crystalline concerto. But this time, the orchestra and Brooks-Bruzzese really got it all together for Mozart's Haffner Symphony, No. 35 in D major.

Mozart wrote this symphony in 1782 at the suggestion of his father to honor Siegmund Haffner, son of Salzburg's burgomaster, who had been made a noble by the court. Mozart, then in Vienna, wrote the work in about four weeks, sent it, then promptly forgot it. But when he looked at it again later, he found it much better than he remembered.

In fact, it's an incredible masterpiece, with great bursts of energy, as in the daring Octave leap of the first movement's opening theme.

Brooks-Bruzzese conducted an invigorating Haffner and yet didn't neglect the purity and tranquillity of spirit of the gentle Andante, the grace of the courtly Menuetto or the brilliance and agility of the Presto finale. And the alertness and precision of the string playing in particular was a pleasure. It all set the stage for an equally invigorating, and muscular, performance of Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto by Dickran Atamian.

The last time I heard Atamian was in a private home in Miami, a couple of decades ago, previewing his then-new solo piano arrangement of Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring. It was a blockbuster. There was a certain uncompromising straightforward quality about him then, as there is now. His Beethoven was bold, articulate, unaffected, with an eloquently turned slow movement. It reminded me a little of Michael Ponti's virile Fourth Concerto last season and Byron Janis' long-ago Beethoven Third.

Schubert's Fifth Symphony, which capped this concert, wasn't quite as silkily played as the Haffner. There was some breathiness in the flute, which is mercilessly exposed in the first movement, and not quite the melting beauty. Brooks-Bruzzese found in the Haffner. This orchestra can play better than it did in this Fifth. But there were high spirits and all those immortally beautiful melodies - it's just hard to keep a good man like Schubert down.

Critic: Tim Smith

Source of Review: The Sun Sentinel

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.SUN-SENTINEL.COM/](http://www.sun-sentinel.com/)

Date of Review: March 20, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

The Symphony of the Americas' concert Thursday evening at the Broward Center found the ensemble at its most impressive yet, sounding fresh, disciplined and confident. James Brooks-Bruzzese started things off conducting a propulsive, vividly accented performance of Mozart's Haffner Symphony and then welcomed Dickran Atamian for Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3

The pianist is quite a fidgeter at the keyboard, but the results were worth any visual distraction. Incisive phrasing, a big tone and steady technique were put to telling use. Brooks and the ensemble offered Atamian supple, highly expressive support.

Meanwhile, the Close Encounters with Music series was having a concert a few blocks away at Fort Lauderdale's Museum of art. I slipped a way from the orchestra in time to catch the last few pieces of Yehuda Hanani's program of transcriptions for cello.

Cellists have a decent repertoire all their own, but that hasn't stopped them from foraging in other areas. Hanani gathered together works originally written for other instruments or voice.

Effectively accompanied at the piano by Michele Levin, he offered an emotive account of de Falla's Suite populaire espagnole; danced through an old fiddle favorite, Vittorio Monti's Csárdás, with reasonably secure fingers; and caressed a Chopin Nocturne beguilingly.

Critic: Ruth O. Bingham

Source of Review: Star Bulletin

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.STARBULLETIN.COM/](http://www.starbulletin.com/)

Date of Review: May 3, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

Honolulu Symphony's "Magic of Spain" is an unforgettable, not-to-be-missed sensation. Pianist Dickran "Ricky" Atamian played with power, passion and poetry, and guest conductor Max Bragado-Darman inspired the orchestra to produce some of its finest work this season. This is Spanish and French music at its best.

Atamian performed Saint-Saens' Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, opus 22, a standard but very difficult work in piano repertoire. The concerto showcased of-course-phenomenal technique, but technique alone no longer distinguishes pianists. More importantly, his playing was vibrantly alive: expressive, meaningful and full of character. It was "authentic" in the original sense of the word.

Atamian's intense, hulking approach to his instrument seemed oddly reminiscent of descriptions of Beethoven, an impressive reinforced by his playing. With fierce concentration, Atamian made the piano sing, growl, peal, declaim, dance and soar.

Their ensemble infallible, Atamian and conductor Darman communicated with subtlety and sensitivity. Darman, who described Atamian as a "free performer," provided the flexibility needed: his orchestra matched the piano perfectly in tone and at every turn.

Throughout the concert, Darman balanced precision and clarity with the colorful, passionate expression so typical of Spanish music. He opened with Joaquin Turina's Prayer of the Bullfighter, a

work Darman called "mystical." Exquisitely wordless, the deeply felt prayer rose in crystalline clarity until it faded into the ether.

The concert's second half could have seemed anti-climactic after the Saint-Saens, but Darman's readings of Rimsky-Korsakov's Capriccio Espagnol, opus 34, and three dances from De Falla's Suite No. 2 from his ballet The Three-Cornered Hat, were electrifying.

Lively music and Spanish dances enticed toes to tap and hearts to leap, but only timpanist Stuart Chafetz got to dance, bouncing as he played - the envy of all who had to sit properly still.

Capriccio Espagnol, sometimes called a concerto for orchestra, and the De Falla work showcased numerous fine solos by virtually every principal chair in the orchestra. In fact, it is difficult to know where to stop the list of praise: brass choirs were strong; the entire percussion section shone; balance was excellent; even minor phrases were well shaped; etc.!

Suffice it to say that it was extraordinarily exciting and worth every minute.

Critic: Joseph Rothstein

Source of Review: Honolulu Advertiser

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.THEHONOLULUADVERTISER.COM/](http://www.thehonoluluadvertiser.com/)

Date of Review: May 4, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

Sunday's performance by the Honolulu Symphony, billed as the "Magic of Spain," was a reminder that national identity has produced gifts for all to treasure, just as it has sometimes led to ethnic warfare. The concert repeats tonite.

There was a time, before mass media and multinational corporations, when music and food were the hallmarks of national life. Pacific Rim cuisine and World Beat music have their appeal, but they are part of an increasing homogenization of world culture. Something is lost in the melting pot.

Guest conductor Max Bragado-Darman, a native of Spain, has spent much of his career in the United States and on the international guest-conducting circuit. Throughout, he has championed the music of his homeland.

His program began with Joaquin Turina's "La Oracion del Torero (The Prayer of the Bullfighter)." The score, for strings alone, is by turns meditative and dramatic. Like the Andalusian region it depicts, it combines the piety of the Catholic Church with the charismatic passion of the bullring.

Bragado-Darman brought a torero's grace and flair to the podium. He sliced the air with his baton, brought his fingertips to his lips, or clasped his hands as if in prayer. Bragado-Darman, so different stylistically from the symphony's usual conductor, Samuel Wong, was nonetheless similarly effective.

The wild card in the Iberian-themed program was Camille Saint-Saens' Piano Concerto No. 2 in G Minor. Saint-Saens devoted himself to establishing a characteristic French music to counter the pervasive influence of Richard Wagner's German romanticism.

The concerto opens with a quasi-cadenza for piano, unaccompanied. Soloist Dickran Atamian barely sat down before unleashing a torrent of notes that continued virtually non-stop to the work's end and a rousing ovation. There are no demure, understated melodies here, just an onslaught of

bravura pianism. Think of it as a side-trip across the Pyrenees, if you like, but the French pastry was a welcome counterpoint to the intensely dramatic Spanish works.

A tourist's impressions may sometimes capture the spirit of a place, if not the depth. So it is with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's "Capriccio Espagnol." Its gloss on the rhythms and textures of Spain seemed pale in comparison to the real thing, but there is no denying Rimsky's genius as a colorist and master of orchestration.

The program closed with Manuel De Falla's Suite No. 2 from "El Sombrero de Tres Picos (The Three-Cornered Hat)," arguably the only true masterpiece on the program. Like Rimsky-Korsakov, De Falla excels at lush ensemble passages and exquisite solos. Yet De Falla's Spanish portrait has the ring of authenticity and sincerity of feeling to match. Opportunities abound for flute, oboe, English horn and violin, among others. The orchestra's first-chair players performed each solo beautifully.

Among the many reasons we are "lucky we live in Hawaii," we should surely count ki ho'alu and mele kahiko. Add to that list the Honolulu Symphony for its fine musicianship and a reminder that cultural identity can be a source of shared enjoyment rather than divisiveness.

Critic: Whitney Smith

Source of Review: The Commercial Appeal

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.COMMERCIALAPPEAL.COM/](http://www.commercialappeal.com/)

Date of Review: May 15, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

As interpreted by resident conductor Vincent L. Danner and the orchestra, the program moves from the Teutonic revelry and majesty of Brahms's Academic Festival Overture, to alternating percussiveness and caresses of Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto, to wonderfully free storytelling in the allegorical Rimsky-Korsakov Scheherazade, showmanship goes a long way toward selling the show, as previous Memphis Symphony renditions have attested.

At Friday's concert for an audience of about 650 at Eudora Baptist Church Auditorium, piano soloist Dickran Atamian, Danner and the orchestra seemed determined to plunge the depths of each piece to more profound levels.

Toward that end in the Prokofiev, the bearded, pony tailed Atamian played a lead role. Other interpreters might exert power above all by hammering above the orchestra. Atamian's performance, while aggressive, brought out fabulous contrasts in articulation and phrasing. He even seemed to take the lead in certain tempo changes.

The conductor's sensitive attention to the sweeping scope, colorful instrumentation and magical storytelling qualities of the Rimsky-Korsakov contributed greatly to Friday's successful performance.

Drastic variance in tempo, intensity and character brought great emotional impact to Friday's performance. So did the tremendous liberties Danner allowed soloists.

Concertmaster Susanna Perry-Gilmore got into the dramatic portrayal of the clever wiles of Sultana Scheherazade's life-saving stories to such an extent with her recurring themes and quasi-cadenzas, it was as if they had done her up in veils.

Among many other solo highlights, clarinetist Jim Gholson rippled softly and mysteriously into one of his big themes, and oboist Carolyn Banham danced her way through her Middle-Eastern harmonies and lilting tempos.

Critic: Chip Chandler

Source of Review: Amarillo Daily News

Source URL: [HTTP://AMARILLONET.COM/](http://AMARILLONET.COM/)

Date of Review: September 7, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

Saturday's Amarillo Symphony concert featured the starting ground of two historic events: the symphony's 75th anniversary season and the incremental premiere of what appears to be a promising new work.

The two are intimately connected. Symphony officials once again have commissioned composer Samuel Jones (1991's "Palo Duro Symphony") to write a symphonic suite. One movement will premiere at each of the symphony's subscription concerts this year.

Saturday's performance at the Amarillo Civic Center saw the debut of "Windmills," the second movement of "Roundings: Musings and Meditations on Texas New Deal Murals," and it was a propitious beginning. "Windmills" was suitably evocative of its subject, from the sounds of the water pump from the bassoon to a plaintive moan of thirst from the violins.

Conductor James Setapen took time to explain how Jones used different musical figures to represent his subject. The short, informative lecture was a smart and welcome way to instruct the audience on how to listen to the new piece of music.

The evening also included a thrilling piano soloist unfortunately playing on a sub-par instrument. Dikran Atamian didn't seem to let the oddly metallic-sounding piano affect his performance of Serge Prokofiev's "Piano Concerto No. 3," but the sound was disturbing, nonetheless.

The wildness in Atamian's pony-tailed appearance translated into his playing. His hands bounded across the keyboard, his head jerked, his feet kicked. At times it seemed as if he would fly off his seat.

The Prokofiev composition plumbed a spectrum of emotions, from frolicking to impassioned within just a few measures. Too bad the piano itself didn't live up to its player and the selection.

The orchestra closed the evening with a familiar favorite, Tchaikovsky's "Suite from the Ballet 'Swan Lake.'" While the piece might have been considered a comfortable chestnut, the performance was fresh and, thanks to Setapen's dramatic conducting, dynamic.

The suite's eight movements offered a number of skillfully played solo turns, including Robert Krause's flawless oboe solo in the opening movement, Dave Ritter's stirring trumpet solo in "Neapolitan Dance" and a beguiling harp solo by Stephanie Bowen.

The concert bodes well for a stellar anniversary season.

Critic: John S. Sweeney

Source of Review: Advocate Online

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.NEWMASSMEDIA.COM/](http://WWW.NEWMASSMEDIA.COM/)

Date of Review: October 9, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

Thomas Crawford opened the season of the American Classical Orchestra at the Norwalk concert Hall last Saturday with a flourish of trumpets and drums.

It took the form of prophetic music by Gluck and Mozart, performed on original instruments, with Crawford's characteristic force of conviction that ironically gave the music a contemporary twist.

The impression given was that the elegant grace of Mozart and the "beautiful simplicity" of Gluck could also give off sparks of anger with discordant harmonies and a scowl usually associated with Beethoven.

Gluck, who predated Mozart by 45 years, was still the rage in Vienna when Mozart was scribbling off his masterpieces and Crawford selected instrumental excerpts from Gluck's opera "Orfeo ed Euridice" to demonstrate what the public was used to hearing.

Crawford conducted the Overture with freshness and drive, but it could not dispel the music's somewhat perfunctory lack of invention. The "Dance of the Blessed Spirits," supplying the most seductive melodies of the concert was by contrast truly lovely.

Sandra Miller's solo on the wooden flute, a blend of sensitivity and skill, gave off new awareness of non-inflated lyricism. She was abetted by Crawford's flowing tempos that never yielded to romantic perceptions of sentimental passion. It was clean and pure and, indeed, beautifully simple.

The contrasting "Dance of the Furies" dispelled any hope for a devastating hurricane. It stayed properly within its little frame, ending rather disappointingly with a quiet diminuendo, no doubt a ségüe to a more placid moment of the opera.

But with two of Mozart's mature works, the larger dimensions opened up. Dickran Atamian performed the A major Concerto No. 23, K. 488, on the Regier fortepiano, built just last year as a replica of the Anton Walter pianos known to Mozart.

It certainly was not a Steinway. It had no pedals, only five octaves, and could be carried away without strain by only two stagehands.

PR hype in the program notes described it as "musically superb," but to the crass ears of today, certain notes had elements of a bar-room piano. But that is the essential point of period performance. We learn to listen from a different point of reference.

It became evident that Mozart knew precisely how to make the fortepiano sound at its best. Atamian is a young virtuoso who performs such improbable things as a piano solo transcription of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" on the modern piano.

Perhaps in order to compensate for the instrument's comparative lack of dynamics Atamian sometimes adopted a non-metrical approach, lingering over a meaningful modulation for emphasis. He added ornaments sparingly, did not double the string basses during the tutti passages, and played Mozart's own cadenza "exactly as written," although with a free improvisatorial style.

Tempos were again aristocratically elegant and brisk, with sentimentality avoided like an unpleasant disease. The winds gain new prominence with historic instruments and Mozart's mastery of writing for them became evident.

The concert ended with a spirited performance of what many have called Mozart's greatest symphony, his daringly complex "Jupiter" Symphony in C major, K. 551.

It has never been an easy work to perform, and its technical execution on valveless winds and brass, combined with sometimes less agile strings, made it seem all the more like a bold challenge. In this performance, sleek smoothness was never automatic and authentic instruments do not always play in tune.

Crawford made no concessions with his vigorous tempos. His interpretation, however, was anything but hard-driven, with many insightful glimpses along the way.

The polyphonic details of the last movement, no longer obscured by a sodden mass of contemporary strings, was startling, both rhythmically and harmonically. Mozart sounded like an angry demonstrator with clenched fists.

It takes energy to re-think such a familiar old work along these lines and listen with different ears. Trumpets and drums seemed to dominate its final moments as never before. The scurrying scales and blustering rhythms took on an aggressive quality and the usually bland key of C major seemed to nag like an overwrought wife. Whoever said that period performance was icky-picky?

Critic: Jerry Young

Source of Review: Austin American Statesman

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.AUSTIN360.COM/STATESMAN/EDITIONS/TODAY](http://www.austin360.com/statesman/editions/today)

Date of Review: October, 11 1999

Critical Acclaim:

Friday night's appearance by piano virtuoso Dickran Atamian with the Austin Symphony Orchestra was a quarter-of-a-century overdue. The controversial former University of Texas piano student has succeeded where few pianists do in having a career as a concert pianist, making high-profile recordings on major labels and performing with major orchestras around the world. His bad-boy reputation notwithstanding, one can only wonder why it took so long for him to be invited to play with the Austin Symphony.

Atamian gave a masterful and memorable performance of Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto. It's a perfect vehicle for Atamian's titanium technique, which has become even more commanding since he first gained international attention as a student here in the early '70s.

Atamian pounced mercilessly on each scale and arpeggio, evenly shaping and polishing each note. He often pushed tempos to the edge of the orchestra's comfort zone, although things never fell apart, and the ever-present risk brought you closer to the edge of your seat.

The concert opened with a lively reading of Dvorak's "Carnival Overture" with a tautness that foreshadowed the Brahms First Symphony, which made up the concert's second half. With its close-order imitative counterpoint and its penchant for playing upside-down versions of a melody alongside the original, Brahms' First Symphony has plenty for the ears and head. But its emotion-charged melodies and seismic harmonic changes often tempt fools to rush in, threatening the work's structural integrity.

Keeping the orchestra on a tight rein allowed Peter Bay to bring out many of the work's subtle details. Microscopic diminuendos on secondary, supportive motives and carefully planned articulations were stunning and effective, especially in the outer movements.

The downside of polishing little details is that it becomes more noticeable when other details don't get the same care, as was occasionally the case in the middle two movements, where some inner lines raveled and frayed.

One of the great challenges is controlling the orchestra's momentum as it passes through the work's many thresholds, making sense of where the mood changes with tempos, meters and textures. Bay and the orchestra deftly stepped through several of those places where orchestras tend to stumble, especially in the out movements, but uncertainty at times made those transitions appear as seams especially in the third movement.

But holding back brought extra glory to that great towering turning point in the last movement, where the brass players swap majestic licks at the work's summit in preparation for the mostly carefree trip home.

Critic: Robert C. Fuller

Source of Review: The Des Moines Register

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.DMREGISTER.COM/](http://www.dmregister.com/)

Date of Review: November 14, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

Pity the young American composer. His (or very occasionally her) only purpose, orchestral wise, seems to be to provide short, colorful, and rhythmic curtain raisers with jivey titles.

So was the case Saturday night at the Civic Center as the Des Moines Symphony, under the baton of Joseph Giunta, began its concert for an audience of 1,665 with Michael Daugherty's "Route 66."

Daugherty, a Cedar Rapids native and former composer in residence for the Cedar Rapids Symphony, provided what was called for, a six-minute work that was full of orchestral wizardry and kinetic energy.

The concert concluded with the Piano Concerto by the Soviet-Armenian Aram Khachaturian. Due to the political climate in which he composed, Khachaturian also wrote to please rather than to convey deep musical profundity. So the Piano Concerto, which is tuneful and big-gestured in a romantic way, pleases but leaves the listener with few lasting musical memories.

Pianist Dickran Atamian played the virtuosic solo with flash and verve. Most interesting was the impassioned middle movement, which also featured the dark and resonant playing of bass clarinetist Joyce Wheeler.

Between these works was the meat of this concert, Igor Stravinsky's "Petrouchka." The oldest piece on the program, this work seemed the newest, the freshest and the most vital.

While it may have shocked the Parisian audiences at its premier in 1911, this work still startles with its gorgeous and sometimes brutal timbre.

In this performance, it was narrated by conductor Giunta. While this might have made this a warm and fuzzy, audience-friendly experience to some, for me it seemed condescending and interruptive.

Mention should be made of pianist Chou-Ling Lin's nimble and crystalline playing in this work.

Critic: Robert C. Fuller

Source of Review: The Des Moines Register
Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.DMREGISTER.COM/](http://www.dmregister.com/)
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Critic: Marry Hoffman
Source of Review: The Columbus Dispatch
Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.DISPATCH.COM/](http://www.dispatch.com/)
Date of Review: December 12, 1999

Critical Acclaim:

Three musical gems written in Vienna during an eight-year period near the end of the 18th century made up the close of the Millennium concert for the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra of Columbus last evening at the Southern Theatre.

Living up to its "Classical Holiday" billing the program presented joyous music by the divine triumvirate of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven -- somewhat atypical programming for this ensemble known for its often 20th-century emphasis.

A fan of the orchestra since Day One, I don't know that I have enjoyed a ProMusica evening more.

The chamber group was in the finest of form under the continually impressive leadership of music director Timothy Russell. With the addition of an outstanding guest soloist, it was a nearly perfect evening.

The centerpiece of the program was Beethoven's "Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Op. 15", featuring Dickran Atamian, whose dynamic pianism transported the audience and brought it to its feet to salute both artist and orchestra at the conclusion.

The superlative performance was intense but sacrificed nothing in beauty of expression.

The concert began with the strings performing one of Mozart's most popular compositions, "Eine kleine Nachtmusik, K 525."

The orchestra expertly delivered the grace, buoyancy and ebullience of this serenade of 1787. Its playful melodies and enchanting twists and turns were presented with perfect clarity and precise tempos.

Russell, commenting from the stage, made sure the audience, if it hadn't caught it, understood the significance of including Haydn's "Symphony No. 99" as the orchestra's concluding offering for 1999.

Although the 1793 work in E flat major, one of Haydn's foremost, received a good performance, it didn't quite match the preceding ones. Contrasts were not always so well delineated, subtle distinctions were sometimes lacking.

The horns and woodwinds were delightfully playful as the finale ended.

Critic: James Avis

Source of Review: The Capital

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.CAPITALONLINE.COM/](http://www.capitalonline.com/)

Date of Review: February 2, 2000

Critical Acclaim:

Those hardy music lovers willing to brave the winter snows and find their way to Maryland Hall on Friday evening heard one of the benchmark performances of the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra under its enterprising and adventurous music director, Leslie B. Dunner. Plagued by restricted rehearsals, a missing soloist and an inaccessible hall, the orchestra overcame all obstacles to render its finest performance of the season in a program of tortuous length and high demand.

The setting was the music of Vienna and two of its most respected sons, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Anton Bruckner. Pianist Dickran Atamian (fetched from Dulles International at the last minute when BWI was closed) was heard in Mozart's ravishing A Major piano concerto, K.466, preceded by the saucy and festive overture to Mozart's early opera, "The Impresario."

The orchestra laid into the overture's classical theatrics with energy and accuracy, though at times the pace seemed a bit limp. Mr. Dunner chose to suggest moments of grace and delicacy by slightly slacking the pace instead of flexing within the tempo--a legitimate device, but for me an arrhythmic distraction in an otherwise excellent reading.

Mr. Atamian's Mozart was an entirely different animal. His view of the "Piano Concerto No. 23," belying its intimate and congenial nature, was rendered in a thoroughly heroic and intense performance. The score can support this perfectly agreeable approach, if not finding it especially in

keeping with the work's salon-scale origins. Mr. Atamian is a superb technician, and matches his fire and fluidity with moments of acute sensitivity (like gradually softening the last two or three notes of a solo section before the full orchestra's re-entry).

The orchestra was magnificent and Mr. Dunner was on top of his game, flexing with the somewhat "romantic" moments in his soloist's temperament and the occasionally tardy arpeggio that Mozart surely meant to be in tempo. The clarinets of Fred Jacobowitz and Elizabeth Kilpatrick, which Mozart substituted for his usual oboes, were radiantly bright and effective. In fact, the woodwinds in general were at their best in this and the more demanding contributions to come.

"Listening to a Bruckner symphony is like riding the waves of a very large sea in a very small boat," said the renowned Viennese music critic and Brahms partisan, Eduard Hanslick.

Orchestras, conductors and their more knowledgeable public often see a successful Bruckner performance as coming of age moment. For all three, it's an emblem of real maturity. For the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra, its performance of the "Symphony No. 6 in A Major" was a defining moment. Apart from the National and Baltimore symphony orchestras, I know of no other in the area that has the capability of accomplishing what the ASO achieved on Friday night (to say nothing of the will to undertake it). The orchestra had it all together: the strings were full and radiant, the woodwinds in every respect a delight, the brass in full complement (a particularly critical ingredient in Bruckner) as poised and accurate as I've ever heard them.

Bruckner was a deviser of grand moments, as grand as any in symphonic literature. His "big statements" are interspersed with short, parenthetical asides that may appear as irrelevancies or a kind of "musicus interruptus." But like distractions in the course of a long journey, they have a dramatic purpose as well, offering a breath and respite before resuming the trek. It is the conductor's task to preserve the long view, bringing us back to the pace after the pause.

Bruckner's great tonic assertions fulfill a kind of expectation of the inevitable. They are not romantic moments of sensuous melody so much as beautifully sculpted and polished granite steps that fulfill the expectation of rising. One may dally on the landings, catch one's breath, but when returning to the climb, the conductor's pace must be dependable, the treads even, the lift consistent so one can concentrate on the ascent.

Mr. Dunner is a great romantic storyteller and he knows where Bruckner's emotional buttons can be pushed. The dance-like woodwind injections, the great galumphing rhythms of the scherzo, the soaring melodic plateaus of the adagio are all flights and landings in Bruckner's great climb, and Mr. Dunner carefully shaped each for maximum effect, but perhaps at the expense of separating the rise from the respite. These minor moments of excessive passion and an occasional failure to completely connect the dots, however, did not diminish the orchestra's triumph, which was certainly Mr. Dunner's triumph as well. He should be proud of himself and his orchestra's exciting achievement.

Critic: David Rumohr

Source of Review: Lansing State Journal

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.LANSINGSTATEJOURNAL.COM/](http://www.lansingstatejournal.com/)

Date of Review: February 21, 2000

Critical Acclaim:

At Saturday's performance of the Greater Lansing Symphony Orchestra, conductor Gustav Meier surprised the audience by playing Johannes Brahms' "Symphony No. 2 in D Major" first, with

Gregory Glancey's composition "Streamline" and Maurice Ravel's "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in G" after the intermission.

Brahms' magnificent symphony is rich with elaborately developed themes. But the listener is aware only of the beauty and drama of the music.

On this occasion, there were some spots in the inner movement where intonation and ensemble were not quite up to the level people have learned to expect from the orchestra.

But the musicians did themselves proud as the fourth and final movement, Allegro con spirito, drove relentlessly to the conclusion, a kind of gigantic Brahmsian war whoop by the full orchestra.

After the intermission, Glancey's "Streamline" surprised and delighted the audience. The program notes characterized it as alternating expressive, quasi-tonal passages with rigid, dissonant material.

It proved to be music of striking beauty, employing a large percussion section with the full orchestra and offering the musicians considerable technical challenges.

To a first-time listener, it alternated densely scored, harmonically ambiguous passages requiring complex interplay between instrumental voices with lyrical passages that incorporated a variety of solo instruments. The young composer was warmly applauded for this fine work.

The last number was Ravel's piano concerto, featuring Dickran Atamian as the soloist. Ravel was basically a classicist. But he had an iconoclastic streak; he admired Claude Debussy and Erik Satie, and on a visit to America, he picked up jazz ideas from George Gershwin.

With the composition, he struck a metaphoric finger, a la Satie, up the musical establishment's nose. The first movement, Allegro moderato, starts with a simulated pistol shot, and employs some decidedly jazzy idioms.

The lovely second movement, Adagio assai, opens with a long solo passage for the pianist. Richly bitonal, it nevertheless has Mozart stamped all over it.

When the orchestra enters, the pianist plays scales and arpeggios that twine through the music. A long diminuendo piano trill brings the movement to a hushed close.

Conductor and soloist took the last movement. Presto, rife with jazzy interjections from the brass and woodwinds, at a swift pace, Meier drove the ensemble to Ravel's slam-bang finish with a verve that left the musicians panting and the audience laughing with delight.

Atamian, who has technique to burn, gave a muscular, extroverted performance despite a bandaged right hand.

The quiet, meditative Adagio really needed a slower, more introspective treatment than he gave it. But in the outer movements, which call for bravura passagework, his playing was fluent and polished.

Critic: Allan Ulrich

Source of Review: San Francisco Examiner

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.EXAMINER.COM/](http://www.examiner.com/)

Date of Review: May 12, 2000

Critical Acclaim:

Back in 1979, when Atamian recorded Sam Raphling's clever solo transcription of Stravinsky's epochal 1913 score, the RCA Victor LP assumed cult status overnight. The performance disappeared in the digital era, and Atamian, a former Naumburg Competition winner, never achieved the superstar niche the recording portended. Happily, somebody at Delos didn't forget and, in finally reissuing "The Rite" on CD, they have placed all aficionados in their debt. Twenty years later, these remain 31 of the most exciting minutes of piano playing ever recorded.

Critic: Amber Hunt

Source of Review: Cedar Rapids Gazette

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.GAZETTEONLINE.COM/GCDA/FRONT](http://www.gazetteonline.com/gcda/front)

Date of Review: May 15, 2000

Critical Acclaim:

Cedar Rapids -- Close your eyes while listening to Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5, Op. 47, and you're bound to see a heart-wrenching story unfold before you.

Maybe you'll picture lovers struggling through a tumultuous affair or a nation battling a roller coaster stock market.

Regardless, the piece, as performed by the Cedar Rapids Symphony Orchestra at the Paramount Theatre on Saturday, captures the ups and downs of life by contrasting moods between movements. The symphony brought to life two other compositions as well: Overture to "The School for Scandal," Op. 5, by Samuel Barber; and Piano Concerto in G, by Maurice Ravel.

The final piece, Shostakovich's was a beautiful end to the symphony's 1999-2000 season. It was written in the Soviet Union during Stalin's reign and is said to depict a nation the composer pitied. The final movement, which can sound deceptively triumphant with its blast of horns and electrifying percussion, actually depicts a forced death march.

Appropriately, portions of Symphony No. 5 sound forced, frantic and almost out of tune, an effective way to illustrate the mixed emotions of the time. The piece's third movement almost brings tears to your eyes, featuring one of many solos by Jane Walker, principal flutist.

Ravel's piece featured guest pianist Dickran Atamian, who has garnered praise from the Philadelphia Inquirer, Boston Globe and New York Times, among other publications.

And rightfully so. Atamian made playing the piano look easy, as though the keys were an extension of his fleet fingers.

Barber's piece complemented its successors beautifully, making Saturday's performance a wonderful end to the symphony's season.

Critic: Martha Fawbursh

Source of Review: Citizen Times

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.CITIZEN-TIMES.COM/](http://www.citizen-times.com/)

Date of Review: November 20, 2000

Critical Acclaim:

"Totally Tchaikovsky," the Asheville Symphony Orchestra's third masterworks concert in the 2000-2001 series, was a very satisfying experience for the big, appreciative audience which filled Thomas Wolfe Auditorium Saturday evening.

Throughout this concert, the orchestra demonstrated the admirable playing, which its grateful audiences have noted in the previous two concerts.

Under the direction of Paul Polivnick, its third guest conductor of the season, the ASO delighted its listeners with the richness of Tchaikovsky's melodies, inventive harmonies and provocative rhythms and vibrant orchestral colors. Polivnick's energetic, precise direction left no doubt as to what we wanted from his players.

"The Coronation March for Czar Alexander III," the first work on the program, was a satisfactory performance but seemed somewhat sluggish, lacking the fire and energy the listeners expected. The next piece, the Symphony No. 1 in G minor, began with a rather unexciting but acceptably played first movement.

In the second movement, the players were more deeply involved with Tchaikovsky's music, beginning with the expressive, chorale-like string melody representing a profound desolation, an emotional state which the composer portrays as well as anyone ever has.

In the last two movements the orchestra came alive with brilliant playing from all sections, bringing their first half of the concert to a very satisfying conclusion.

The principal work of the evening, the Piano Concerto in B-flat minor, was a riveting performance by Dickran Atamian, whose imposing technique, expressed equally in the prevailing virtuosity and power of this great concerto as well as in the slower, sustained measures of its second movement, held the attention of the audience from the first notes to the last. Although some people found his exaggerated gestures distracting, most were too dazzled by his superb playing to express any kind of displeasure.

Clearly Atamian fits neatly into the distinguished line of piano virtuosos whose skills recall Rachmaninoff and his immediate musical descendants. The spontaneous standing ovation which greeted Atamian's performance was richly deserved.

Critic: Valerie Scher

Source of Review: The San Diego Union-Tribune

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.UNIONTRIB.COM/](http://www.uniontrib.com/)

Date of Review: December 4, 2000

Critical Acclaim:

....The ever-so-dynamic downtown concert was care of the San Diego Symphony, artistic director Jung-Ho Pak and guest pianist Dickran Atamian, who presented the second of three performances Saturday at Copley Symphony Hall.... At the San Diego Symphony, there were no impromptu substitutions. Instead, there was music that had long been expected: Respighi's "The Pines of Rome" plus Khachaturian's "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra" and excerpts from the ballet "Spartacus." (As an encore, pianist Atamian presented Rachmaninoff's gentle Prelude No. 4 in D Major, Opus 23.)

The surprise was how well the Respighi and Khachaturian worked together. Any doubts about the wisdom of combining these less than profound 20th-century scores were dispelled by the involving nature of the performances.

Pak treated the "Pines" with energy and affection, inspiring a grand collaborative effort from the orchestra. The score's atmospheric effects were knowingly conveyed, as when a group of brass players supplied blasts from the balcony or when principal trumpeter Calvin Price provided sweet and sure passages from behind the stage.

Khachaturian's "Spartacus" -- awarded Russia's Lenin Prize, the Soviet seal of approval, in 1959 -- is music with more brawn than brains. But it received a smart performance that didn't overdo the bombast, especially in the propulsive lilt of the waltz.

The evening's liveliest work was Khachaturian's 1936 piano concerto, whose intensity borders on the maniacal and whose intensive demands on the pianist caused Atamian to cover his fingertips with protective tape. Nothing deterred the Michigan-based soloist, who excelled at florid lyricism, hammering chromaticism and rapid-fire octaves that exploded in a burst of fortissimos. Quite a catch, that Khachaturian.

Critic: Kathleen Eriksen

Source of Review: The Pueblo Chieftain

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.CHIEFTAIN.COM/](http://www.chieftain.com/)

Date of Review: December 17, 2000

Critical Acclaim:

Saturday night it was a birthday bash!

The present was a polished music box that put forth exquisite musical strains.

The birthday honoree was Ludwig van Beethoven, 203 years old. The music box was the University of Southern Colorado's Hoag Hall and the musical strains were provided by the Pueblo Symphony.

Attending the party were more than 500 celebrants who heard the symphony's third concert of the season, featuring the works of Beethoven and talents of guest pianist Dickran Atamian.

It was a double birthday for Maestro Jacob Chi. A few weeks earlier, his wife Lin gave birth to a daughter, Juliette.

Opening the concert was an impressive rendition of Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Opus 68. Although the "Pastoral" symphony evokes delicately painted scenes of country life, it focuses more on feelings than bucolic descriptions.

The first movement, "Allegro ma non troppo," began gently and led into a building of the strings that eventually exploded into the bloom of the full orchestra. We had arrived in the country.

The music of "andante molto mosso" flowed like a gently moving brook. Adding realism and humor to the scene were a trio of birdcalls provided by the flute, oboe and clarinet.

The third movement had a complement of orchestral dynamics and the serenity of solo instruments. Threads of dance music glistened through it creating the image of country folk at a party.

"Allegro" created a sensation of fleeing within the intensity of a musical storm, complete with the lightning cracks and thunder of the drums.

With "Allegretto," the clouds parted into a fully joyous sound.

Leaving behind the Pastoral's romantic feel, the concert's second half featured an earlier work by Beethoven.

Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Opus 15 was brought fully to life through the dynamic performance of virtuoso Atamian.

A dramatic orchestral beginning led us into the intensity of Atamian's playing. He easily shifted from delicate fingering to forceful strokes. When the orchestra fell silent, the full range of his technical and aesthetic artistry was displayed, creating an intense emotional response to the movement's abstract quality.

The fervor of that movement was then tempered with the slower tempo of the stately "Largo." A clarinet solo complemented the piano's expressive range.

The last movement, "Rondo, Allegro," revisited the initial theme as it alternated with contrasting episodes, creating a brilliant texture.

The audience gave Atamian a standing ovation after an extraordinary performance.

Critic: Carl Hoover

Source of Review: WacoTrib.com

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.WACOTRIB.COM/](http://www.wacotrib.com/)

Date of Review: January 20, 2001

Critical Acclaim:

"The Waco Symphony Orchestra's first concert of the real millennium," as musical director Stephen Heyde put it in his opening remarks, offered a Waco Hall audience some things rarely seen in a local symphony concert: a large-screen video interpretation, a pre-inauguration performance of "The Star-spangled Banner," an orchestral encore and a baton flying through the air.

The Thursday night concert also featured guest pianist Dickran Atamian's energetic performance of the Saint-Saens Piano Concerto No. 2, which was eclipsed by the orchestra's glorious reading of Gustav Holst's symphonic poem "The Planets" in the evening's finale.

... The stocky, intense Atamian, too, displayed a visual energy in his playing, his dynamism reflected in thundering chords, sharp nods and hand flourishes. Filled with driving tempos and cascading runs, the Saint-Saens concerto seemed well-suited to show off that side of Atamian's playing, yet the silken tones the pianist stroked from the piano during the work's infrequent reflective passages made one long for more of the same. Heyde's baton popped out of his hand in the course of the concerto, landing behind him and Atamian, but all continued without missing a beat.

Atamian and the Waco orchestra are no strangers to the concerto, yet at times they seemed to be playing from different pages. Tempos and dynamic levels that sometimes didn't mesh smoothly, plus shared themes that lacked highlighting, gave an impression of a sporadic sense of partnership in the piece. The audience didn't mind, giving Atamian a gradual standing ovation, as it did for the orchestra after "The Planets." ...

Critic: Carmen Geraci

Source of Review: Lexington Herald-Leader

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.KENTUCKYCONNECT.COM/HERALDLEADER](http://www.kentuckyconnect.com/heraldleader)

Date of Review: March 10, 2001

Critical Acclaim:

The audience for last night's concert by the Lexington Philharmonic found itself caught in the middle -- a great place to be, as it turns out.

The concert opened with *The Chairman Dances* by contemporary composer John Adams. Adams is often unfairly grouped with the minimalist composers, so-called because they rejected the complexity of much 20-century music in favor of a much-simplified style: Triadic harmonies. Simple chord progression. Short motives. Repetition. Repetition. Repetition. This is all meant to have a hypnotic effect, but with this much repetition, the composer had better have a good idea.

Adams has good ideas. And they can't be called minimal. In short, Adams is entertaining, and conductor George Zack kept the work flexible and enjoyable.

Ironically, many in the audience who were scratching their heads in bemusement quickly embraced the performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5. at the time of its composition, this was the revolutionary work, emphatically breaking with tradition.

Placed side by side, the two works fascinated with their similarities. One composer looking to the past for inspiration met the other composer confidently striding to the future. In this context, it was easy to hear Beethoven's fragmenting of themes as Adams' pulsating motives. Beethoven's catalytic use of the timpani echoed Adams' percussion engine. Both employed rhythmic complexity and alternated orchestral textures, from delicate pizzicato to sweeping movement.

The Philharmonic and piano soloist Dickran Atamian also managed a middle ground, achieving both heroism and elegance. Atamian is an impressive pianist, making the most difficult passages clear and distinct.

The lovely second movement was both airy and warm, lyric and hymn-like. The sly transition to the third movement was masterfully handled, and Atamian pushed the work to its limits...

Critic: Sabine Kortals

Source of Review: The Daily Camera

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.THEDAILYCAMERA.COM/](http://www.thedailycamera.com/)

Date of Review: March 24, 2001

Critical Acclaim:

"No cool gray tones for me!

Give me the warmest red and green.

A cornet and a tambourine,

To paint my jubilee!

For when pale flutes and oboes play,

To sadness I become a prey;

Give me the violets and the May,

But no gray skies for me!"

-anonymous verse offered as a prelude to George W. Chadwick's "Jubilee"

Although sincere sympathy is extended to pianist Alexei Sultanov whose recent accident prohibited him from appearing with the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra as scheduled, his last-minute substitute -Dickran Atamian - was anything but a second-best alternate.

On the contrary, in a rousing and evocative performance of Sergei Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Major, Atamian displayed breathtaking prowess at the keyboard - a veritable powerhouse of glorious sound, passion and technical brilliance.

Although Prokofiev's American tenure was largely unsuccessful, this most popular of his concertos consists of a colorful blend of distinctly American overtones and equally unmistakable Russian harmonies.

Guest conductor Michael Morgan expertly and effortlessly complemented Atamian's precise performance in an exciting and triumphant rendition of a work replete with verve and emotion. The result was enthusiastic applause and three ovations by an appreciative audience.

Indeed, Atamian's diminutive stature belies his esprit, vigor and unflagging stamina as an artist who is capable of both dazzling technique and intuitive musicality...

Critic: Gordon Brinton

Date of Review: June 5, 2001

Critical Acclaim:

Standing at the entrance to the Performing Arts Center, it's November 11th and the chilly air appropriately sets the stage for a Russian musical culture experience in York, Pennsylvania. The marquee of the Strand Capitol blares "Russian Night IV" and the York Symphony Orchestra is preparing to perform works by three famous Russian composers. As I find my seat, I take in my surroundings and observe, to my delight, the many residents of York and neighboring towns, dressed to impress. The orchestra members begin moving into position and the sounds of tuning instruments drift from the stage. I make a quick run through of the program while the last couple audience members find their seats. The house lights dim and an announcer walks to center stage. The concert hall erupted with applause and thus my evening at the Orchestra began.

The itinerary was exciting: three pieces by three different composers. The Prince Igor Overture, written by Alexander Borodin, commenced the concert. It was then followed by the second, and largest piece of the evening, Symphony No. 1 in G Minor, written by Vasily Kallinikov. This symphony contains four movements, beginning with the allegro moderato, followed by andante commodamente. The third movement is scherzo: allegro non troppo – Moderator assai. The symphony then concluded with the finale: allegro moderato. After a short intermission, the orchestra and soloist Dickran Atamian, finished with the popular Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Minor written by Piotr Tchaikovsky. It was three movements, the first, allegro non troppo e molto maestoso, second, andante semplice, and the final movement, allegro con fuoco.

Sounds of sadness and tragedy initiate the Prince Igor Overture by Alexander Borodin. This piece, a twelfth-century opera, tells the story of the misfortunes and suffering experienced by Prince Igor and his son, after being imprisoned. This slow and easy introduction is a great way to warm up the audience and as I looked around it seemed as if every person was already hypnotized by the rhythmic sound of the instruments.

The exposition contained two separate themes, which were difficult to distinguish at first, probably due to the shortness of the piece. The first theme, played by a solo clarinet, accurately relayed the

feelings of both love and uncertainty expressed by Princess Kontchakovna. The second theme is that of Prince Igor who is remembering and longing for his wife. The entire woodwind section introduces this theme and then relinquishes it to a solo French horn. While listening to the French horn, I could feel in the music both the sorrow and regret felt by the Prince. In both themes, the soloists do an exceptional job of portraying their characters. I felt as if I could close my eyes and visualize the entire plot as it was unraveling.

After a short development, the overture was concluded with a fast and triumphant recapitulation. It came as a large contrast to the exposition and was both louder and more positive in tone. Although the slowness of the beginning of the piece did serve to warm up the audience, I welcomed the ending and its upbeat tone. As a whole, the orchestra played the piece excellently, but I felt the music itself was slightly depressing and detracted from the large amount of excitement and anticipation I came with.

The second, and my favorite piece of the evening, was the Symphony No. 1 in G Minor by Vasily Kallinikov. It began with the first movement in sonata style, which was *allegro moderato*. It was marked by two easily distinguishable themes, which, through repetition, I quickly learned and began humming along with. The first theme was disjunct and attention grabbing. It was introduced by strings and progressed into the woodwinds but was played most pronounced by the loud horns. I thoroughly enjoyed this theme and found it to be the melody I took with me after the concert. The second theme, played by the cellos and repeated by the violins, had a calming and peaceful feel to it. It was chromatic and relayed a sense of tranquility. The combination of the best parts of both themes came together to make an exciting development. The slow, chromatic pace of the second theme was slowly built up and intensified until it would be followed by the contrasting, fast and disjunct sound of the first theme. The strong ending was very suspenseful and especially impressed me.

The second movement was *andante commodament*. It was introduced by a harp, which I describe as the feeling of a wintry landscape with falling snowflakes. Both themes return in this movement with the first being played now by the English horn. The second theme, in a different key, was introduced by the oboe but also is very nicely performed once in a flute solo. This movement was relaxing and sounded peaceful, old, and traditional.

The third movement is a scherzo with a trio and is *allegro non troppo – Moderato assai*. The movement is in A-B-A form and instantly appealed to the dancer in me. It started out with a happy sounding "A" theme, with the violins keeping the triple meter rhythm. I found myself tapping my foot along with the conductor's baton. The "B" theme had a very contrasting sound and was gloomy and sad feeling. This time the cellos kept the duple meter rhythm. The combination of the two themes, first fast, then slow, made it even more exciting when, after a small transition, the fast "A" theme returned in the last part. The final section, which was much louder than the first, was a great finish to the movement and I was excited of its return.

The fourth movement of the piece was the Finale and it was incredible. It began sounding like the first movement but quickly distinguished itself with a quick rhythm and use of the full orchestra. Both themes return in an A-B style in the finale. This movement was short, but had a couple different parts where I thought it would end with one last soft note, but was then intensified and continued with great enthusiasm. I loved the use of both deep and high instruments in the sections and especially the use of the kettledrum and the triangle at the end.

Overall, I believed the orchestra excellently played the Symphony No. 1. Each movement fit together perfectly and the finale truly confirms the phrase, "All is well that ends well."

The third and final piece of the evening was the Piano Concerto No. 1 in B minor by Piotr Tchaikovsky. The piece is split into three movements and is set off by a dramatic introduction. I was eagerly awaiting this piece because of my love for pianos and my longing was satisfied when those first three chords were played.

The first movement was dominated by the piano. The pianist used incredibly complicated and fast paced solos, dotted with broken chords. Because of the complexity of this movement, it was difficult for me to distinguish the themes. I enjoyed the piece, but believed the orchestra should have had a larger part. The first movement was long and I found great respect for the endurance of the pianist.

The second movement was slow and started out nicely with a flute solo. It contained some main piano sections, but the orchestra contributed largely to its distinguishable theme. This movement was noticeably shorter than the first and ended in a satisfying return to the opening theme. I feel this movement provides a necessary slowing in order to make the final movement more dramatic.

The third and final movement of the piece was allegro and was in triple meter. It was louder and faster than the first two movements and contained an equal mix of both piano solos and full orchestra. Once again, the pianist returns to the complicated, broken chords used in the first movement. Both the pianist and orchestra excellently played the finale, and they supported each other very well. It was great to see the entire orchestra play similar notes and act in unison. I was so impressed with the movement that I edged my way to the front of my seat and listened intently as the finale came to a triumphant end.

Overall, I felt Russian Night IV was excellent. I came to the concert with anticipation and left satisfied. I was slightly unimpressed with the first piece, but the second and third pieces definitely made up for it. The orchestra played exceptionally and the concert hall relayed brilliant sound. The solo pianist for the third piece played superbly and was truly involved in the piece. The overall environment was even one I enjoyed. I felt that by attending this concert, I was a member of a sophisticated and cultured society and at the same time gained a little bit of Russian music experience.

Critic: Robert Finn

Source of Review: Chautauqua Daily

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.CHAUTAUQUA-INST.ORG/DAILY.HTML](http://www.chautauqua-inst.org/daily.html)

Date of Review: August 20, 2001

Critical Acclaim:

The all-Russian program has become a cliché on the American Symphony orchestra scene over the years. It is easily put together from standard repertory items and it sells tickets.

The Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra, however, did the Russian thing with a difference in the Amphitheater Saturday night. There was indeed one popular item on the bill - a suite of the most familiar excerpts from Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet ballet of 1936.

But it was partnered not by Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninoff, but by the once-popular piano concerto by Aram Khachaturian, written at almost the exact same time as Prokofiev's ballet. Perhaps music director Uriel Segal's point was to show two composers working at the same point in time but in utterly different stylistic worlds.

One has to add, too, on vastly different levels of musical quality. The Prokofiev ballet is one of the great masterworks of the first half of the 20th century. Placed next to it, Khachaturian's concerto, full

of folksy bluster and virtuoso glitter, sounds campy, even with a pianist like Dickran Atamian, who has all the required technique and temperament, handling the solo part.

The seven excerpts from Romeo and Juliet were splendidly done, and skillfully guided by Segal from the podium. In the dance movements he set very brisk tempos, but stopped short of rushing the music unduly, and the CSO players handled the assignment easily.

What was most commendable about the performance, however, was the sheen and lyrical impulse that animated the orchestra's sustained soft playing. Segal asked for and obtained some sonorities that were scarcely above an orchestral whisper, but they were beautifully delivered by his players.

By contrast, the concluding "Death of Tybalt" section was full of tragic grandeur. That section is usually used to end suites of excerpts from this ballet, even though it has to be wrenched out of context for the purpose. It does end the suite with a big bang indeed.

Of all the tons of music inspired over the years by the Romeo and Juliet story, I would argue that Prokofiev's searingly beautiful ballet score is the best. It has on occasion been performed (and recorded) at full length by symphony orchestras.

It takes two and a half hours or so to perform complete, but it is well worth the trouble, for there is a vast lot of great music there beyond what we hear in the various suites of excerpts.

I suppose it is impractical to wish that some day the Chautauqua Symphony might perform the whole blessed thing. Well, I wish it anyway--and I'll be in the audience when it happens.

Dickran Atamian played Khachaturian's concerto with blazing virtuosity and a sure understanding of its folk-influenced idiom. There is nothing subtle about this piece, and Atamian did not try to find subtlety there.

He just whaled away vigorously at all those lush folksy tunes and clusters of thick chords. His fingers were fast and accurate and his interpretive instincts of the right sort.

There were spots where he lost the battle to be heard above the orchestra, but that was doubtless the fault of Khachaturian's brash Hollywood-style orchestration. Segal understood the nature of the piece, too and let his players roar out lustily. No sense pretending that this is Mozart!

Segal set quite fast tempos at the opening of the first and third movements, but nothing went awry save for one or two spots where orchestra and soloist were not quite on the beat together.

It was a rousing performance of a work that cannot survive any other kind. The audience was delighted and rewarded orchestra, conductor and soloist with a loud ovation. One would like to hear Atamian again soon in a less flashy and more musically substantial concerto.

Critic: Phyllis Rosenblum

Source of Review: Santa Cruz Sentinel

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.SANTACRUZSENTINEL.COM/](http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/)

Date of Review: October 2, 2001

Critical Acclaim:

Music by Elgar, Grieg, Khachaturian, Ibert and Saint-Saens filled the Civic Auditorium Saturday evening, as the Santa Cruz Symphony ushered in its 44th season.

Maestro John Larry Granger opened on a somber note with moving remarks about the Sept. 11 tragedy, the music world's loss of legendary violinist Isaac Stern, and our own more personal loss of Jean Lerner — in Granger's words, "the best friend the symphony ever had."

After the singing of the national anthem, the orchestra played an unprogrammed stirring rendition of the "Nimrod" movement from Elgar's 1899 "Enigma Variations," as a tribute to the fallen.

After a hushed opening set a thoughtful tone, gradually increasing volume built to a fervent intensity, relaxing finally into a peaceful calm.

Musicians then held their instruments in place for a moment of contemplative silence.

The orchestra displayed top form despite a summer break and a few personnel changes.

The opening 1888 "Peer Gynt Suite No. 1" by Grieg brimmed with the potential pitfalls of its high-exposure, transparent orchestration. The gentleness of "Morning Mood," and "Ase's Death" flowed smoothly, with clean ensemble and consistent tone.

However, a dropped object in the audience and a faintly beeping truck outside, momentarily threatened the serenity of the second movement.

Granger's interpretation of Grieg's opening movement was understated, perhaps in an effort to avoid the work's clichéd familiarity, by its use as cartoon-background. At times, he overshot the mark, resulting in a perfection that lacked warmth.

Graceful and lilting, "Anitra's Dance" shimmered with ever-so-gently applied triangle "pings." It's amazing how such a tiny sound carries so well, and has such an important effect on musical coloration.

"In the Hall of the Mountain King," the suite's final and most well-known movement, came alive in its spooky, dramatic glory. There was no holding back here, as the magnificent conclusion satisfied any pent-up cravings for release.

Khachaturian's bracing "Concerto in D-flat Minor for Piano and Orchestra," throbbed in the hands of powerful soloist Dickran Atamian.

His fleet-fingered cadenzas sparkled, and he captured the raw energy of the work's folk melodies. At times, though, this rugged work became overly rough when Atamian's wild gestures introduced errant notes into the composer's already dense harmonies.

This little-known concerto deserves greater play. It contains some great music for the orchestra as a whole, and unleashes intriguing interplay with the soloist.

The work also showcases individual players. A supple bass clarinet solo beautifully opened the "andante con anima" second movement. Principal percussionist Norman Peck displayed his impressive skill on the "flexatone," a small, toy-like, metallic shaker, almost never seen in classical compositions. It produces eerie, high-pitched vibrations that, here, capped and matched the orchestral melody line.

French composers' impressions of other lands completed this first program of the Symphony's "season of exotic and unique music."

Ibert's 1922 "Escales (Ports of Call)" and Saint-Saens' 1877 "Bacchanale from Samson and Delila" featured oboist Dane Carlson in sinuous, eastern-flavored solos.

Each work glowed in a celestial quality provided by not one but two harps.

Ibert's third movement "Valencia: Animé" displayed the orchestra's agility with quick mood changes, as the music alternated pulsating rhythmic passages with halting, fragmented melodies.

Saint-Saens' "Bacchanale," as seductive as a Delilah, drew us in, as Carlson's graceful twists and turns led into a racing heart-beat rhythm. The infectious melody spun out flawlessly, ebbing and flowing with subtle accents and swells.

The finale, a grand orchestral statement led by tympani and French horns, was an evening's triumphant close.

Critic: William Glackin

Source of Review: The Sacramento Bee

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.SACBEE.COM/](http://www.sacbbee.com/)

Date of Review: October 8, 2001

Critical Acclaim:

"Professional is a word often used loosely in the arts. But if it means anything in relation to symphony orchestras, it should mean the way the Sacramento Philharmonic opened its fifth season Saturday night in the Community Center Theater.

It could be applied to any part of the program, including an overwhelmingly dynamic performance of the solo role of Saint-Saens' Piano Concerto No. 2 by Dickran Atamian and a transcendently well-stated performance of the Brahms Symphony No. 2 by Michael Morgan and the orchestra.

But it came strongly to mind in the very first number on the program, the Suite No. 2 for strings in E by the American composer Arthur Foote (1853 - 1937). "Professional" is a good word for the skill with which Foote wrote this music and seemed especially apropos for the way the Philharmonic's string players played it.

Foote's music is not all that frequently played these days; he was part of a group of late 19th century Bostonians who were eminent in their day as the Boston Six but are considered rather conservative in ours: John Knowles Paine, Horatio Parker, George Chadwick, Edward MacDowell and Amy Beach were those listed in a program note Saturday.

Morgan did the Philharmonic's audience a favor in remembering Foote and his three-movement suite. It clearly won the heart of Saturday's audience.

It deserves a place in the long list of serenades written for strings in the 19th century and earlier. The list begins with Mozart and includes, famously, Tchaikovsky and Brahms. Foote's is in three movements: a prelude a middle movement of beautifully harmonized pizzicato music, flanking a stroked section, and a strongly constructed fugue for a finale.

It was superbly well conducted and played. The string tone was outstandingly unified, the intonation was absolutely secure, and the whole performance was warmly felt. It was more than professional: it was distinguished.

Atamian, who has a stocky build bordering on burly, started the Saint-Saens like an explosion. Restlessly moving back and forth on the bench, he attacked the music with the force of a conqueror

and the art of a virtuoso. In terms of technique he was dazzlingly up to the composer's demands, which at times verge on the unreasonable, and seem unrelenting.

Together, pianist and conductor and orchestra set, and kept up, a pace that added excitement to the startling brilliance of Atamian's virtuosity, But there was artistry to admire, too, in the long solo cadenza and in the music that led to the finish of the first movement.

Saint-Saens wrote a scherzo for the middle movement that is almost like Mendelssohn in its bounce. Atamian gave its two-handed chords effervescence, and enjoyed the tiny cadence at the end. The finale, marked Presto, calls for quick-turning trills up and down the keyboard that were icing on the cake. At the end, the audience leaped to its feet with shouts. It was a terrific performance all around, and Atamian was able to smile at last.

The Brahms Second, with its melodious beauty and general air of thoughtfulness, seemed just the thing with which to follow the fireworks, after a necessary intermission. The way Morgan and his players searched out its fluctuating characteristics was profoundly illuminating -- yet another aspect of professionalism.

The first of the four movements was a prime example of this. Listening to the way the themes echo each other makes it clear that they are actually a kind of family, sharing certain characteristics -- similar turns of melody, even upside down.

Melody, lyricism and thoughtfulness rule the first three movements. The finale finds excitement in a kind of celebration.

The playing was exemplary. Brahms gives everybody a workout; rightfully, when it was over Morgan called up the orchestra in sections, brass, woodwinds, strings; it was everybody's achievement, including his.

Critic: Patricia Beach Smith

Source of Review: The Sacramento Bee

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.SACBEE.COM/](http://www.sacbbee.com/)

Date of Review: October 15, 2001

Critical Acclaim:

Pluck is what it takes to tackle Beethoven, and the Auburn Symphony appeared to have plenty of it Friday as the ensemble opened its 15th season on a high note at Placer High School Auditorium.

The 60-plus players of this all-volunteer orchestra pulled off a credible all-Beethoven program including his Symphony No. 7 in A minor, one of his more challenging compositions, the familiar Piano Concerto No. 3, and a "Fidelio" overture that opened the program. A near sell-out crowd of about 600 attended the concert in a hall that is very unkind to music.

In guest pianist Dickran Atamian's skillful hands, Beethoven's 200-year-old piano concerto in C minor, was still fresh and exhilarating. This was Atamian's second recent triumph in the Sacramento area, having thrilled crowds on Oct. 6 with his performance at the opening of the Sacramento Philharmonic's season.

Atamian's playing was determined and dynamic as he unfolded Beethoven's beautiful melodic themes, giving them elegant nobility as the composer developed them into more complex elements. The orchestra matched Atamian's enthusiasm with ready musical retorts and reiteration of the themes.

The first movement was at once delicate and powerful, trading melodies with marches in masterful settings. The second movement's plaintive and somber chords developed into a hymn -- a fitting memorial for the recent victims of the Sept. 11 attacks, to whom the concert was dedicated. In the more celebratory third movement, Atamian's performance was so intense he seemed to be part of the piano, not just someone playing it. The orchestra in this movement was always on cue. Daniel Canosa's careful conducting helped shepherd the orchestra in the right directions.

Canosa's quiet, precise direction proved commanding as the orchestra performed the Symphony No. 7, landing its attacks, severe cutoffs and varied dynamics like a gymnast in fine form, despite uneven tempos. The string sections sometimes suffered and the fickle French horns had occasional hiccups, but the woodwind section was reliably effective and redeemed the entire effort.

Critic: Lee Teply

Source of Review: The Virginian-Pilot

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.HAMPTONROADS.COM/](http://www.hamptonroads.com/)

Date of Review: October 29, 2001

Critical Acclaim:

The combination of familiar repertoire with a talented conductor and soloist made for a thrilling evening Saturday at Chrysler Hall. The Virginia Symphony was led by Gerhardt Zimmermann, music director of the North Carolina and Canton Symphonies, in music that was basically Russian, with ties to Armenia and France.

The French connection was found in the ever-popular "Pictures at an Exhibition," the Mussorgsky piano piece that Maurice Ravel turned into a masterpiece of colorful orchestration. It is heard so often, either live or on recording, that one does not exactly look forward to another performance. But, once it became clear that this was going to be an unusually fine interpretation, each movement was eagerly anticipated.

Zimmermann chose decisive tempos that moved ahead, passing by the Impressionist interpretations that do not really fit the composer. He also avoided blurred effect by bringing out the many details of Ravel's instrumental combinations. With everything in proper balance, the larger pictures became remarkably clear.

The orchestra seemed thoroughly committed to the task of exploring the score's grand drama, as well as its many components. With their wide dynamic range, the players helped keep everything in proportion.

A multitude of fine solos materialized along the way, but ones that stood above the rest were those of Stephen Carlson, principal trumpet, and; saxophone soloist Helen Martell. Carlson's authoritative tone rang out to open the piece and returned several times with varied timbre. The plaintive sound Martell used in her haunting melody was a perfect recreation of Eastern European melancholia.

When the "Great Gates" of the last movement opened up, the splendor of the entire orchestra was fully revealed. What glorious sound! What uplifting spirit! More than in any other performance in memory, this truly was the culmination of everything that came before.

The program had opened with equal energy in Michail Glinka's Overture to "Russlan and Ludmilla." The rich combination of violas and cellos in the second theme gave lyrical contrast to the busy main theme.

For the evening's guest soloist, pianist Dickran Atamian, the showy concerto by Aram Khachaturian was the perfect vehicle. As he sped through thousands of notes, he maintained clarity. His sure sense of timing gave structure and variety to the sprawling mass of sound. He had a fine touch for the calmer melodic lines, and his cadenzas topped off the outer movements nicely.

The orchestra had no small role in the huge work. Often it supplied the driving repeated rhythms of Khachaturian's native dances. And it added oriental colors in some of the solos, particularly in oboist Sherie Lake Aguirre's flexibly shaped arabesques.

The creative orchestration gave bass clarinetist William Thomas a rare spotlight several times. His sound, focused to project well, further enriched the concerto's exotic atmosphere.

Critic: William Glackin

Source of Review: The Sacramento Bee

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.SACBEE.COM/](http://www.sacbbee.com/)

Date of Review: December 30, 2001

Critical Acclaim:

Best symphonic classical music concert

Many virtuoso pianists play forcefully, if only at times; with Michael Morgan and the Sacramento Philharmonic in the Community Center Theater on Oct. 6, Dickran Atamian seemed about ready to reduce the piano to kindling. But "virtuoso" is the operative word when it comes to the Concerto No. 2 of Camille Saint-Saens, or so it seemed, because the performance was a huge hit with the audience, and it did work well to show the challenging brilliance of the music.

Critic: Nat Bauer

Source of Review: Rockford Register Star

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.RRSTAR.COM/](http://www.rrstar.com/)

Date of Review: January 26, 2002

Critical Acclaim:

This past Saturday evening at the beautifully restored Coronado Theatre in Rockford, it was a night beside the sea with maestro Steven Larsen and the Rockford Symphony Orchestra in a program aptly titled "Musical Seascapes."

The program included works by Wagner, Prokofiev and Debussy -- and the Midwest premiere of a work by modern composer Dana Paul Perna.

The evening opened with Richard Wagner's overture to his opera, "The Flying Dutchman." Set on the open seas, the Dutch sea captain vows to sail around the Cape of Good Hope, even if it takes eternity.

Of course, the devil takes him literally, as does the woman who would intervene to redeem the captain. Though relatively unknown today, its overture presents all the major themes of that work. Typical of Wagner is the use of a full orchestra with equally dynamic orchestration, giving a well-received rousing beginning to the evening.

With the nine-foot piano rolled in, the guest artist of the evening, Dickran Atamian, a pianist with many renowned awards and achievements, prepared to perform Sergei Prokofiev's Piano Concerto

No. 3 in C Major. Of Prokofiev's five concertos, this one is probably the only one well-known and performed with any regularity.

The work requires great physical energy, musical skill and mastery of the entire keyboard -- and an orchestra capable of the difficult accompaniment. Atamian gave ample evidence he was more than worthy of all the accolades he has received with his dazzling performance of this concerto. Pausing frequently to wipe his brow, he exuded virtuosity and an exciting energy that more than amazed the audience.

The work begins quietly in the woodwinds but quickly moves to presto tempo and remains there for most of the three movements of the work. It is imperative that the orchestra maintains momentum with the soloist in tempo and dynamic, and they were exceptional throughout. The orchestration is full and in a few spots did somewhat overpower the piano.

But they were minor and certainly did not detract from the whole. Atamian and the RSO received a lengthy standing ovation for a remarkable performance.

After intermission, the RSO presented the Midwest premiere of "Prouts Neck," a symphonic poem by composer Perna. The piece took the audience to the rocky shores of Maine, giving a realistic and beautiful sound picture of the mist, fog, crashing waves and undulating sea. For someone who vacationed five miles from there numerous times as a child, the music brought back a host of fond memories.

The poem begins with the hushed sound of the morning fog on the ocean, crescendos to portray the beauty and mystique of the sea and returns to the fading sound of the fog-shrouded, murmuring sea.

Perna, who was present, was invited to the stage to receive ovations and express his appreciation to the orchestra for its fine presentation of this introspective work.

The final presentation of the evening by Larsen and the orchestra was Claude Debussy's "La Mer" (The Sea). Quite unlike the two previous selections, Debussy gives the Impressionist rendition of the ocean.

Throughout, one senses the restlessness of the sea and the kaleidoscope of colors of the seemingly endless expanse of ocean. The three sections are named: From Dawn to Noon on the Sea, Games of the Waves and Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea. Each movement describes in musical detail the sea scenes, with the various orchestral sections given opportunity to provide color and intensity to the pictures.

The work ends triumphantly and full with a return to the chorale from the first movement.

As the evening was over, the audience expressed sincere appreciation for the RSO.

Nat Bauer is music director at First Presbyterian Church in Belvidere.

Critic: Georgia Pampel

Source of Review: The Rock River Times

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.ROCKRIVERTIMES.COM/](http://www.rockrivertimes.com/)

Date of Review: February 6, 2002

Critical Acclaim:

The Coronado rang out Saturday night, Jan. 26, as an enhanced Rockford Symphony Orchestra and Pianist Dickran Atamian gave us an evening of both delights and challenges, led by Steven Larsen.

The program opened with the overture to Richard Wagner's opera, *The Flying Dutchman*, now certainly an old "warhorse" in the repertoire, familiar to all, with its easily accepted themes—rollicking sea chanteys, the love of a good maiden and convincing atmospheric impressions of a storm tossing the hapless vessel on threatening waves. Wagner conceptualized his operatic works in the most grandiose fashion (remember the Finale of *Gotterdammerung*, with Valhalla in flames, crashing into the flooded Rhine River while the Rhine Maidens swim around down below, and the Valkyries ride through the air above on horseback?). Well, *Dutchman* foreshadows that sort of ambition, as the ship founders, and the musical dynamic ranges from the softest piano to a fortissimo that could blast us all back out onto Main Street. Throughout the overture, the melodies came forth strong and clear, and it set challenging pace for the evening to come.

While latecomers found their seats, the orchestra milled around on-stage to make a pathway for the concert grand to be brought to the fore. Chicago-born Dickran Atamian, a winner of the prestigious Naumburg Competition (along with numerous other prizes), now focuses his career on concertos, offering a choice of 12 this season, 10 of them drawn from the conventional classical "greats," plus Aram Khachaturian's only piano concerto, and Serge Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto, which was our treat Saturday.

Originally premiered with the Chicago Symphony in 1921, with the composer at the keyboard, this concerto merges the then-experimental modern idiom with lush melodic episodes, driving rhythms and intense passions, resulting in a work that has become an audience favorite in the 20th century repertoire.

Atamian has enormous energy and pours it all forth to do justice to the Prokofiev, sometimes appearing to levitate, other times nearly falling off the piano bench while running the keyboard from end to end. Clearly living the music every moment, whether sitting at rest or playing, he attacks the piano like a man possessed. It becomes irrelevant to ask if he hits any wrong notes. Who could tell, when the fingers fly that fast? The pulse of the music drives it forward, and Atamian's intensity and dedication convince the ear that the notes are (amazingly) all there, and all exactly what the composer called for. In the second movement, he shifts into another mode, to do justice to the more lyrical themes, showing that while he can pounce on the piano as if it were the enemy, he can equally caress it as a lover. At the end, he had a big bear hug for Steve Larsen, to celebrate their triumph, while the audience rose in tribute, calling Atamian forth again and again with their applause.

In his pre-concert lecture, Larsen spoke of the orchestra and the piano "fighting" each other in the third movement, before resolving the question of what key to play in. Clearly, Atamian and Larsen felt that they had reached a heartfelt truce, to celebrate a clear dual victory.

In the second half of the program, however, this music reporter ran into some dilemmas, as both Dana Paul Perna's musical essay "Prouts Neck" in its Midwest premiere, and Claude Debussy's "*La Mer*", written nearly a century earlier, reached out to convey the composer's impressions of fog, mist, surging waves and sparkling surf, achieving their effects by instrumental combinations and swirling musical lines.

I enjoyed the sounds in both works, but kept reaching for something more to hold in memory. (I had listened to the Debussy several times during the week in preparation, but still could not recognize it or name favorite passages, even though my source book of musical themes identifies 11 separate melodic motifs in the Debussy.) Larsen calls it "one of the great orchestral works of all times." I guess I'll have to listen to it a few more times to make it my own, but Saturday night's audience

rewarded the ensemble with its usual tumultuous applause, which often seems to be both for the specific work and for the welcome evening of well-chosen musical essays.

Composer Dana Paul Perna, a longtime friend of Larsen's, was on hand to hear "Prouts Neck" in its second concert presentation ever, and he explained its origins when he joined Larsen for the pre-concert talk. He often visited grandparents in Rochester, New York, where he became a fan of marine painter Winslow Homer. Eventually, he tried to translate his impressions of Homer into a musical expression, which he calls a "symphonic essay" rather than a tone poem, since most tone poems derive from a written source—Don Quixote, Don Juan, Zarathustra, etc. Often, several separate voices would weave in and out, and just as the ocean's waves can be unpredictable, just so did this work sometimes seem to reach a final climax, only to surge on in a new direction.

With a relatively brief piece such as this, totally unfamiliar, it could be interesting to consider doing what sometimes works well, programming it immediately before the intermission, then encoring immediately after the intermission, to give the listeners a second chance at it. Until that happens, we just have to mark our calendars to listen to WNIU when, I believe, they will broadcast the taped concert on radio, Monday, Feb. 18 (as usual, the Monday night before the next classical concert).

In the meantime, the Prokofiev played on and on in my head throughout the night. But I promise to work harder on making the Debussy more familiar, OK?

Critic: Michael Hill

Source of Review: The News Tribune

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.TRIBNET.COM/](http://www.tribnet.com/)

Date of Review: February 18, 2002

Critical Acclaim:

There really are only two kinds of musicians - those who play the notes written on the page and those who make music out of the notes written on the page.

Pianist Dickran Atamian clearly falls into the second category.

Atamian, who has spent the past three decades perfecting his craft, more than proved that Friday night at the Pantages Theater, where a full house saw him perform Edvard Grieg's famed Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 16, with the Tacoma Symphony. And what a performance it was.

From the first note, Atamian attacked the piano as if his life depended on it, conjuring swirling arpeggios and rippling melodies from the instrument with remarkable technical precision and undeniable fire.

Head down, sweat dripping from his brow, the pianist wrestled with the keyboard as if he were wrestling with his demons, squeezing every last drop of emotion from Grieg's heroic score.

While the adagio movement showcased Atamian's reflective, lyrical side, the finale found him taking on more heart-stopping cadenzas and other thrilling, virtuosic displays of keyboard mastery with a focused, full-bore fervor.

And, if the ensemble seemed intimidated by Atamian's playing, it may well have been because they simply couldn't match the ferocious intensity the pianist brings to the stage.

Though the rousing ovation that followed the performance of the Grieg concerto came as no surprise, it also earned the audience an added treat.

Prompted by their enthusiastic response, Atamian returned to the piano for a lovely reading of Rachmaninoff's sublime Piano Concerto in D Major, Op. 23.

With the formidable soloist out of the way, the ensemble itself fared better on Texas composer Timothy Kramer's recently-penned "Bach meets EsCHeR," an intriguing polyphonic exercise influenced by the work of both J.S. Bach and graphic artist M.C. Escher; and on Hector Berlioz's epic "Symphonie Fantastique."

For the latter, the symphony bolstered its ranks with harps, tubas, trombones and an army of percussion, filling the entirety of the stage as well as some of the balcony, where the chimes - heard in the final movement - were situated.

In performing the landmark symphonic work, the group drew upon a wide range of tonal colors and techniques, including skittering bow work from the violins and violas, maniacally ornamented motifs from the woodwinds and thundering unison bass drum rolls from the percussion section.

Critic: Joseph Pronechen

Source of Review: Connecticut Post

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.CONNPOST.COM/](http://www.connpost.com/)

Date of Review: March 12, 2002

Critical Acclaim:

The Greater Bridgeport Symphony's "All-Time Favorites" concert emblazoned the Klein Memorial Saturday night with a pair of contrasts, each stunning.

Actually, the first of the pair, Haydn's Symphony No. 99, was really cleverly coupled first with Mozart's Overture to "Cosi Fan Tutte." The two composers knew and admired each other and learned a bit from each other.

Brahms came along later in the program, as he does chronologically. With his Piano Concerto No. 2, the composer; the GBS and piano soloist Dickran Atamian put us through an exhaustively monumental workout that, ironically, left us energized.

Brahm's No. 2 is the concerto that's head and shoulders above all others of the second half of the 19th century -- possibly the whole century. And from the first note of its powerhouse opening, pianist Atamian gave the concerto even more than its just due.

This is no namby-pamby work that treads lightly with gentle introspection. Atamian made that quite clear from the start with unrivaled muscular playing.

The pianist unleashed one powerful barrage after another, fingers flying across the keyboard, sometimes at breakneck speed. Brahms didn't leave much of a letup in the relentless intensity and Atamian matched him perfectly.

Fully in command, delivering each note with unflawed clarity, Atamian led the GBS assault on Brahms' Everest of a concerto. He mesmerized us with the climb and pulled us along with him.

With perfect balance, soloist and orchestra even surprised us when near the summit the mood turns into a gentle salve, a short respite from the exhaustive but exhilarating ascent. Atamian shifted gears into this new mood with his characteristic finesse.

Atamian gave us more than a virtuoso performance. Like the Brahms' concerto itself, it was poetically epic.

As for Haydn, conductor Gustav Meier described a wonderfully simple difference between the composer and Mozart.

"Mozart flows, a miracle unexplainable, a God's gift," he said. Haydn, meanwhile, was a human being, Meier said, full of surprises, energetic, humorous. With Meier solidly at the controls of good-old No. 99, this symphony streaked along as a streamliner full of good cheer:

Where other composers would be stately, this Haydn vehicle proved elegant. But the elegance appeared as a comfortable and carefree as Fred Astaire did in a top hat, white tie and tails.

The light-as-a-feather GBS strings and the free-flowing woodwinds nicely captured Haydn's characteristic optimism and cheerfulness. Even when movements turned into an elegant courtly dance, the strings skipped and skimmed along until the orchestra gave us a Haydn-surprise by stopping on the proverbial dime.

When Meier and the GBS accelerated into the flashy finish, they filled it full of joy and Haydn-esque good cheer.

Critic: Roy C. Dicks

Source of Review: The News & Observer

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.NEWSOBSERVER.COM/](http://www.newsobserver.com/)

Date of Review: April 13, 2002

Critical Acclaim:

If you want proof that the North Carolina Symphony is a major orchestra, try to get a ticket to tonight's performance in Meymandi Concert Hall. I heard the program Thursday in Durham's Carolina Theatre, and even in that venue, which is not kind to orchestras, the all-Russian program allowed the players, the conductor and the featured soloist to offer a first-rank, long-to-be-remembered experience.

From the first few bars of Glinka's "Russlan and Ludmilla Overture," conductor Gerhardt Zimmermann put the audience on notice that this was going to be a spirited, vivid evening. Often heard on light classics concerts and CD collections, this rousing piece really works only when it takes wing at a dizzying pace. Zimmermann set a merciless tempo, but the players sped along undaunted, the sudden stops and melodic hand-offs among the instruments confidently and precisely dispatched.

This energetic performance helped soothe the disappointment of its substitution for the selections from Gliere's rarely heard ballet "The Bronze Horseman" as printed in the program. (Why was this not announced from the stage or corrected with an insert or at least posted in the lobby? Many audience members may now have Gliere and Glinka permanently confused.)

Pianist Dickran Atamian joined in for a dramatic, intensely felt playing of Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3. This is the most popular of that composer's five, because it successfully combines his unique way with dense dissonances, percussive rhythms and ever-changing tempos with a warm lyricism and emotion. Atamian was fascinating to watch as he reacted to the music's intensity, his head snapping and wiggling, his left foot swinging and stomping, his whole body lunging forward in attack mode for hair-trigger moments.

Atamian handled the blurring runs, the cross-hands scales and the pile-driver chords with determined aplomb, often wiping perspiration from his brow. Whether in the nervous buzzing of the first movement, the martial fire of the second or the languid romance of the third, Atamian played with rich feeling while giving clear articulation to every passage.

Zimmermann brought out all the requisite sweep in the lush sections yet knew exactly where to pull back to a luminous glow under the piano line, keeping the music connected on one tightly coiled spring. This was a mesmerizing, involving interpretation from all concerned.

Such a performance would be hard to top with any work, much less an overly familiar Tchaikovsky symphony, but this was a special night. Zimmermann led his players in a searing reading of the Symphony No. 4, conducting without a score. His beaming expressions and focused energy revealed a joyous commitment to this piece.

The orchestra's brass section played like gods, from the bold fanfare of the "fate" theme in the first movement to the stirring volleys in the last. The woodwinds were dazzling, especially in the glorious mini-ballet of the third movement, in which their scurrying phrases called to mind "The Nutcracker." The strings were ablaze, impressive in their crystalline precision, their massed bowing in the finale a visual as well as a musical wonder.

There could be no better confirmation of the value of the orchestra than this performance, a most compelling reason for support of the arts.

Critic: Daniel M. Heslink

Source of Review: Lancaster Online

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.LANCASTERONLINE.COM/](http://www.lancasteronline.com/)

Date of Review: May 5, 2002

Critical Acclaim:

Often it is said that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," but the truism was extended even deeper by the lavish musical imagery heard during Saturday afternoon's Lancaster Symphony Orchestra concert at the Fulton Opera House.

We use the term "musical imagery" here to refer to the way music can stir visual images in our imagination, and this was certainly the effect with the concert's opening work, James Shearman's "Manhattan Prelude -- A Tribute to John Williams."

Much of Shearman's material was taken from the film "E.T.," but where E.T. wanted to go home, we were inclined to stay.

Our fascination was rooted in a long list of imaginative instrumental effects: muted horns; pizzicato strings; shimmering highlights from the piccolo; exotic tone colors from the percussion; and broad melodies for the strings warmed by a beautiful vibrato.

Maestro Stephen Gunzenhauser crafted the entire presentation by balancing all the musical threads and clearly defining contrasts of tempo, mood and style.

The program then moved on to a more abstract, emotional mode of communication with the Piano Concerto in A Minor of Edvard Grieg. The orchestra welcomed guest soloist Dickran Atamian to the stage, who performed with an overpowering battery of musical pyrotechnics.

Fire and verve were almost always present, and this did achieve a certain brilliance. The pianist was at his best in the loose structure and expressive freedom afforded by the cadenzas. During the first movement's cadenza, sensitive coloring and adroit use of atmospheric pedaling was effective. The straightforward figuration of the third movement's cadenza lent itself best to Atamian's aggressive, technical approach.

The pianistic gymnastics at times were distracting, masking the details of melodic content and overlooking some of Grieg's more reflective and romantic moods. As always, Maestro Gunzenhauser was attentive to coordinating the texture, but a seamless artistic discourse was difficult to achieve.

All sections of the orchestra played well, and we especially enjoyed the warmth from the clarinet, flute and oboe. Sensitive artistic shading from the strings, both in the coda to the first movement and the intimate, muted introduction to the second movement, was persuasive, as was the trumpet's exciting triple tonguing during the third movement.

The earlier emphasis on musical imagery returned with the concluding work, Maurice Ravel's arrangement of Modest Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition."

Mussorgsky's music parallels an exhibit of drawings by Victor Harmann, and the extant drawings were displayed on a screen behind the orchestra as they performed. Many art appreciators cite these particular drawings as relatively dull and uninspired, but Mussorgsky's and Ravel's fertile musical imaginations operated at a completely different artistic level.

A note of excellence was set with a balanced and unified sound from the brass choir that perfectly captured the opening promenade's processional quality. Imaginative playing was abundant, during the mysterious special effects in "The Gnome," and in the dark colorings of bass drum, bass clarinet, bassoon and euphonium.

In the vignettes based on "Tulleries: Dispute Between Children at Play" and the "Ballet of Unhatched Chicks," an animated rendering of woodwind articulations, accent and detail of line aptly captured the children's spirit.

Finely detailed solo playing was evidenced everywhere, but most notably in "The Old Castle" and "Bydlo," where the impetus of saxophone and euphonium melodies was sustained through subtle variations in vibrato.

During "The Hut on Hen's Feet: Baba-Yaga," the familiar passage for bassoon and plucked lower strings was flawless. "The Marketplace at Limoges" flew by effortlessly, and kudos are due to Maestro Gunzenhauser for the dynamic planing of this charming movement.

While the strings were not given the same soloistic position as the winds, their accuracy, intonation and phrase-sculpting all contributed to the tenor of fine craftsmanship. The narrative quality of the opening passage for strings in "Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle" was especially idiomatic, and the sharply contrasting passages were well-coordinated.

The work's grandiose climax, "The Great Gate of Kiev," provided a sonorous and majestic ending. We especially appreciated the bell tones in the tuba part, the striking contrasts and the restraint exercised early in the movement -- by contrast, this made the massive conclusion that much more impressive.

The correlation between visual image and musical impression explored through much of this program is ideal for infrequent concert attendees who are seeking an event to introduce themselves

to Lancaster's rich classical music scene. There is also much for the experienced concert enthusiast, for the sheer breadth of orchestral color and effect is reason enough to enjoy the program.

Critic: Rebecca J. Ritzel

Source of Review: Lancaster Online

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.LANCASTERONLINE.COM/](http://www.lancasteronline.com/)

Date of Review: May 6, 2002

Critical Acclaim:

"Pictures at an Exhibition," Mussorgsky's Russian masterpiece, was upstaged at this weekend's Lancaster Symphony Orchestra concerts by movie music and a piano concerto.

Music director Stephen Gunzenhauser intended for the well-known suite to be a grand finale for the symphony's 2001-2002 season, but the audience appeared to be more inspired by the pre-intermission music.

Gunzenhauser opened the concert with James Shearman's "Manhattan Prelude," a tribute to movie-score maestro John Williams.

In "Prelude," Shearman pays homage to Williams without mixing a medley of his themes. Instead, he borrows Williams' sweeping film-scoring style which wowed audiences in "E.T.," "Star Wars" and "Jurassic Park."

This music deserves a movie of its own. Without a particular plot to reference, the music invokes a cinematic sequence -- intro, conflict, suspense, romance, climax, denouement.

Gunzenhauser chooses new works with care, and here he chose wisely. The audience was wowed and left to savor the piece while the orchestra awkwardly filed off stage so the Fulton crew could rearrange seating and make room for a grand piano.

Without ceremony or introduction, the orchestra returned and soloist Dickran Atamian took his seat at the Steinway to play Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor, Opus 16.

Atamian is an athletic pianist. Sweat was dripping from his brow by the middle of the first movement, and he grunted slightly to emphasize the fortes, like a tennis player making a sharp backhand return.

Beyond his eccentricities, Atamian plays beautifully, and the orchestra afforded him a respectable accompaniment, despite struggling initially to match his meter and tempo.

Like "Prelude," this music evokes emotions and visions. It is filled with an idealism that celebrates life's triumphs.

No one would have objected to an encore from Atamian.

"Pictures" was, by comparison, anticlimactic.

Mussorgsky's 15-movement symphonic poem was inspired by the premature death of his artist and architect comrade, Victor Hartmann. Using his friend's artwork as a source of inspiration, Mussorgsky composed "Pictures."

Gunzenhauser used slide-projector images of Hartmann's artwork to complement the suite, but the effect was more distracting than complementary.

In the age of PowerPoint the click of a slide projector was an unnecessary distraction. Furthermore, lighting onstage made it difficult for the audience to discern much more than blurry images.

About half of the original images have been lost. Some scholars argue that Mussorgsky created several pictures in his mind or amalgamated Hartmann sketches he remembered. Rather than leave the screen blank during pictureless movements, Gunzenhauser supplied a description of what the picture may have looked like.

My apologies to any vision-impaired people who attended the symphony, but why did so many audience members insist on reading each screen aloud, then talk loudly among themselves without respect for people listening to the orchestra?

During several movements, the musicians created a better image than the slides. The woodwinds practically chirped during "Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells," and creative plucking from the basses and squawks from a muted tuba replaced Hartmann's lost image of "The Gnome."

Gunzenhauser is right. The relationship between the eye and the ear is worth exploring. But his experiment at the symphony with "Pictures" looked more closely at the conflict between the listener's interpretation and the composer's intention.

No one stood after the final movement because there was nothing left to interpret. But at least we learned something and sincerely enjoyed the first half of the concert.

Critic: Anna Crebo

Source of Review: Cape Cod Times

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.CAPECODONLINE.COM/CCTIMES/](http://www.capecodonline.com/cctimes/)

Critical Acclaim:

HYANNIS - Like his first concerto, Franz Liszt's Concerto No. 2 in A-Major was painstakingly revised and condensed - not once, but several times over 20 years.

Even after its premiere at Weimar in 1857 by Hans von Bronsart (with Liszt conducting), the composer continued to work out details before allowing the score to be published in 1863.

Universally admired as the leading virtuoso pianist of his generation and only secondarily acknowledged as a composer, Liszt likely surmised his works for piano and orchestra might provide, ultimately, the ideal vehicle for articulating his revolutionary approach to music.

To his satisfaction, the concertos - both of them surprisingly short and all-of-a-piece (no interludes between movements) - managed to startle everyone. Like unexpected displays of complexly variegated fireworks, they left their listeners both bedazzled and puzzled. Particularly, the second concerto offered richly detailed, Chopinesque poetic insight and splashes of brilliance side by side with powerfully driven, even crude, propulsive passages that shocked 19th century audiences.

They still do, especially when the concerto is performed by an artist who is equally capable of sustained poetic flights and formidable demonstrations of pianistic prowess. Such a pianist is Dickran Atamian.

Listening to his dynamic performance Saturday night with the Cape Symphony Orchestra, the audience seemed to enter a state of suspended animation.

Beyond merely articulating the composer's intentions, Atamian tends to wholly immerse himself in the music, which he then expresses in a very personal style, as though creating it on the spot. This individualized element of immediacy and firebrand creativity - rare in a performer - is, of course, the essence of the Romantic Movement that Liszt spearheaded during his lifetime.

The concerto is replete with inter-connecting dialogue and intricately interwoven passages with the orchestra, so much so that Liszt originally called it Concerto Symphonique.

Presented with elaborate pianistic embroidery are many elegant solos for woodwinds and strings, including a particularly beautiful extended cello solo, which was soulfully performed by principal cellist Bo Ericsson.

In his encore piece, Sergei Rachmaninoff's Prelude, Op. 23, No. 4 in D-Major, Atamian masterfully conveyed a more evocative, melancholic and autumnal mood that he invested with personal emotion. Once again, the near-capacity audience was spellbound throughout.

The 85-member Cape orchestra, led by Royston Nash, opened the final program of its 40th season with Gioachino Rossini's radiant overture to his 1823 opera, "Semiramide," the last opera Rossini agreed to write for the, to his mind, overly regulated Italian opera houses. The strings were especially noteworthy for their spirited clarity and coherence in the Rossini work and generally throughout the program.

Suite No. 2 from Igor Stravinsky's "Firebird" ballet got off to a sluggish start with the woodwinds' somewhat disjointed performance of the brief, curling motifs that introduce the magical bird.

Musical interest soon picked up with the sprightly orchestration and brighter tempo of the firebird's dance.

And the woodwind principals fully redeemed themselves with fine solos during the exotic dance of the 13 captive princesses that followed.

The orchestra's brass and percussion were on full display in the flamboyant "Infernal Dance of King Kastechei." In general, the brass needs to be more precisely articulate and play with a more refined sound. Trumpet and French horn entrances are sometimes splotchy, and occasionally the percussion is overpowering.

The concert could well have ended with the colorful, all-instruments-blazing finale to "Firebird." But, on reflection, it was nice to hear one more characterful piece from the orchestra to close the final program of the season.

Peter Tchaikovsky's "Capriccio Italien" eventually lives up to its title, although the opening section tends to be lethargic, despite repetitive trumpet fanfares. Making the transition from a big, free-wheeling waltz, the capriccio ends with a rousing Italian tarantella.

Critic: Scott Prinzing

Source of Review: The Billings Outpost

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.BILLINGSNEWS.COM/](http://www.billingsnews.com/)

Date of Review: November 13, 2002

Critical Acclaim:

The Billings Symphony Orchestra put on a vigorous and spirited performance Saturday evening of works by Mendelssohn, Beethoven and Brahms works. The appearance of award-winning pianist Dickran Atamian, who was as entertaining to watch as he was to hear, put frosting on the cake of a delightful concert.

The evening began with a welcome by current Billings Symphony Society president Robert Griffin, who earned a few laughs from the crowd. His Florida vote joke was an easy laugh, but his raffle ticket pushing was rather clever.

Griffin displayed the 18-inch pearl necklace by placing it around the neck of his wife, violinist Kathy Griffith. The necklace was donated by Tony Soueidi Jewelers and is helping to raise money for the symphony by the sale of \$10 tickets (\$20 for three tickets). The drawing will be held at the New Year's Eve benefit with "Tribute to the Beatles!"

Griffin removed the necklace, encouraged everyone to purchase tickets, adding that if not a pearl fan, one could buy a ticket and write the name of their favorite member of the symphony on the ticket, as that's what he was doing.

The familiar horn and woodwind phrase that opened the performance of Mendelssohn's "Overture to Ruy Blas, Opus 95" set the tone for a delightful evening of classical-era selections. There were times during this piece when the BSO didn't seem as tight as usual, but they got better with each number.

Beethoven's "Pastorale" (Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Opus 68) is one of the more familiar classical works, so it's no wonder the BSO have performed it twice before (1960 and 1989). The performance was 45 minutes of audio painting.

The second and fourth movements in particular allowed me to close my eyes without fear of dozing, as the imagery provided by the performance supported Beethoven's descriptive titles, "By the Brook-Side" and "Thunderstorm." The reeds and woodwinds were songbirds and the strings and timpani were rolling thunderclouds.

The second half of the concert was reserved for Brahms' Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1, with guest pianist Atamian and Maestro Uri Barnea leading the orchestra like dueling matadors. This animated performance is nothing new for Barnea, but Atamian's punctuated playing was a sight to behold.

If he had played his piano any less passionately, the performance by the orchestra would still have been memorable, but his assault on the ivories and flailing arms created a lasting image.

The final chord brought the full house to its feet, as the majority of the crowd stood up within seconds. The continued applause brought out Atamian for an encore solo of a Rachmaninoff prelude before sending him off with more applause.

Critic: James Duncan

Source of Review: Chieftain.com

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.CHIEFTAIN.COM/](http://www.chieftain.com/)

Date of Review: November 10, 2003

Critical Acclaim:

The Pueblo Symphony Orchestra held session Saturday night at Hoag Music Recital Hall on the campus of Colorado State University-Pueblo. Jacob Chi conducted and the guest artist was pianist Dickran Atamian. Concert sponsors were Art and Lorraine Gonzales.

Two major romantic compositions made up the entire program, Brahms' Fourth Symphony and Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto.

The first three notes of the Brahms symphony belong to the tonic chord. A characteristic of the composer: the falling third and the rising sixth - music intervals that have been compared to various philosophical attributions that Brahms used time and again, announced the importance of the music that was about to be heard.

In the first movement the dialogue between the pizzacatto strings and the staccato woodwinds produce a purposeful cordiality that gives determination to the entire movement.

The slow movement is sheer beauty, opening with a call on the horns which soon the clarinets with the pizzacatto strings (again) sing a wonderfully tender and wistful strain.

The third movement is an honest-to-goodness scherzo (and the first one that Brahms permitted himself to write in his symphonies). Here he revels in a short and welcome bout of boisterousness and adds to his orchestra, a piccolo, a double bassoon and even a triangle!

The finale is a Passacaglia (variations on a repeated bass line). Brahms owes his style to an understanding of the counterpoint of Bach and the structure of Beethoven. By his education he learned to assimilate their separate methods and as a late romanticist, he found a new emotional language in established use. By his own genius, he made the forms wider and more flexible and has shown once more that they are not artificial devices but the organic embodiment of artistic life.

The Passacaglia he borrowed from a Bach theme. The theme is introduced by trombones with full solemn voices in full strength with the woodwinds and other brasses. This movement contains some 30 different variations. The total effect is overwhelming.

Pianist Atamian, as soloist in the Tchaikovsky concerto, demonstrated imperial and sure attacks. He has skill that is exalted in color and rhythm. Atamian was like a tiger set loose! He has great power and rapidity - magnificent muscularity with heaven- storming octaves. His feeling for this concerto was akin to a volcano. The audience roared approval.

Saturday's audience has not yet learned that one does not applaud between the movements of a symphony or a concerto. While Pueblo audiences are enthusiastic and want to demonstrate approval of the music they hear, they fail to realize that to interrupt the flow of a major work with applause is distracting to the musicians and against the grain of the purposes of the composer.

Conductor Chi, back from a harrowing car crash in China, received an energetic ovation from the audience.

Chi expressed his genuine identification with both the Brahms and the Tchaikovsky works with his rapture before the orchestra, now so familiar to Pueblo audiences. He gave definition to the form and the line, and at the same time was most expressive of the emotional content of the works.

Chi is never distracted by the orchestra, but instead loses himself in the sound his orchestra produces, and within the realm that the orchestra allows, he projects this sound to his audience as an art form. Therein lies his musical courage.

Critic: George Warren

Source of Review: The Fresno Bee

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.FRESNOBEE.COM/](http://www.fresnobee.com/)

Date of Review: November 16, 2003

Critical Acclaim:

From the moment he hit the keys, it was apparent that pianist Dickran Atamian intended to create something beyond the mere notes; he hammered at his instrument until he reached the heart of the music and delivered a performance of rare intensity.

Atamian appeared with the Fresno Philharmonic on Saturday at William Saroyan Theatre in a concert called Khatchaturian Centenary.

Theodore Kuchar led the orchestra in Aram Khatchaturian's "Spartacus and Gayaneh" (excerpts), Khatchaturian's Piano Concerto, and Sergei Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27.

The concert opened with the excerpts from "Spartacus and Gayaneh." The first selection began with a fanfare and proceeded to dance through a squeezebox rhythm accompanying folk tunes.

Next, the orchestra raced through the famous "Sabre Dance," one of the composer's best-known works. There was nothing unusual in their rendition, but the energy and joy of this selection came through brilliantly.

The third and fourth selections displayed the wide variety of style that Khatchaturian worked with: from the tender and romantic to the dancing and percussive. The story of this program lay in the concerto, however.

Rather than coaxing the sound from the instrument like many musicians, Atamian seemed to reach beyond the mere working of the keys, as if he wanted to rip the strings right out of the case for greater expression. It wasn't grace, it wasn't elegance; it was pure energy, and it served Khatchaturian's great piano concerto as though it were the composer himself performing.

Atamian swung his left foot casually under the bench as he swayed to his music. He ripped through brutally difficult passages as effortlessly as if he were taking a sip of water. His ease at the keyboard seemed to derive from an inner strength; it's just notes and keys after all. We're beyond that here. Khatchaturian had a lot to say in his music, and ! we couldn't fuss over meaningless details like whether a passage is too hard to bring off.

We'll just play it. Period.

The orchestra carried its part with so much skill, color and expression that it seemed as though one were witnessing a historical event. Kuchar left plenty of aural space for the soloist to shine, and at the same time he led the orchestra to meet the intensity of the soloist. This combination created magic.

After the wildly diverse and colorful music of the first half of the program, the Rachmaninov symphony seemed extremely smooth, refined.

Unfortunately, it also seemed like an afterthought. The gorgeous largo that opens the first movement was so out of tune that one wondered where the Fresno Philharmonic had gone. To their credit, even though the musicians disagreed on the pitch, there was still a great deal of expression; one knew what they meant to play.

Once the largo was done, the orchestra seemed to pull together a bit better, but it wasn't until the second movement, Allegro molto, that the group seemed to really get into the groove. Here, one heard the orchestra surge back to life, and all that remained of the earlier trouble was memory of the expression.

Critic: John Cutler

Source of Review: Lincoln Journal Star

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.JOURNALSTAR.COM/](http://www.journalstar.com/)

Date of Review: November, 2004

Critical Acclaim:

About 800 heard the accomplished pianist Dickran Atamian play the Brahms' "Pianoconcerto No. 2 in B-flat Major," opus 83. The orchestra presented Haydn's "Alleluja" Symphony No. 30 and the "Pulcinella Suite" of Igor Stravinsky before intermission.

Atamian's performance was in itself landmark quality. This veteran of sellouts with the world's noted orchestras wowed the house with his command of keyboard, an almost uncanny sense of Brahms' inner emotions, and super rapport with the orchestra and conductor Ed Polochick.

Applause at the end urged Atamian to offer the Rachmaninoff "Prelude in D major," from Opus 23, and the crowd once again cheered.

But they also cheered for their Lincoln Symphony Orchestra and its cellist Karen Becker, who bowed excellent solo passages in the Brahms andante movement.

Haydn's short early symphony was in three movements ending in a minuet, its exquisite innocence perfectly mirrored by the orchestra. Kudos are due flute principal John Bailey for world-class playing in the second movement, which really is more like a concerto piece.

The orchestra for the Haydn work was mostly strings and a couple of winds. Players executed like one of the great European chamber orchestras.

Likewise for the "Pulcinella Suite" the ensemble approached perfection.

Conductor Ed Polochick compared the piece to a Baroque concerto obbligato, with various instruments taking solo phrases.

Precision, excellent tuning and impeccable ensemble sound came from the execution of this work. Several of the principals are to be congratulated for their short, eloquent solo passages.

Was it a landmark concert? It was, because this orchestra under Polochick's baton has now proved over the season's first three concerts it can play as well as orchestras based in Chicago or New York or London. Congratulations to all.

Critic: Byline Richard Bammer

Source of Review: Solano Community Symphony

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.SOLANOSYMPHONY.ORG/](http://www.solanosymphony.org/)

Date of Review: March 24, 2004

Critical Acclaim:

Midway into Khachaturian's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, Dickran Atamian began to pound the keys so firmly that the instrument's upraised lid began to shake like Jell-O in a bowl. Periodically, he would wipe his forehead, placing the handkerchief to his right, kicking his right leg back now and then as he mashed the keys to articulate the 1936 work's exciting rhythmic drive and exotic colors.

As the three-movement, 35-minute piece ended, after Atamian finished several feverish runs and pulsating eight- and nine-note scales, he had convincingly brought out its grandeur.

Atamian's no-holds-barred interpretation of the Armenian composer's best-known work crowned the Solano Community Symphony's annual Great Composers of the World concert Sunday in the Vacaville Performing Arts Theatre. On the bill's first half were Mozart's relatively short Symphony No. 25 in G minor, demarcated by its dancing rhythms; and Faure's beautifully subdued and languorous "Pelleas et Melisande," a suite for orchestra that predated by several years Debussy's 1902 groundbreaking opera.

The advance word on Atamian, 48, winner of the prestigious Naumberg International Piano Competition at age 19, was no hype: dazzling, true; stunning, often; gifted, undoubtedly. The Michigan resident provided a wake-up call, a sharp percussive contrast, to the concert's somewhat sleepy first half.

A small, black-haired man who sported a rumpled-looking tuxedo, he seemingly flung himself at the piano from the first few notes. His head bobbing like a boxer, he was all business from the start. He evoked the first movement's forceful main theme in major chords, later echoed in the 45-member orchestra, led equally brilliantly by Semyon Lohss, in bass, drums and cymbals. Oboist Jim Waddell sensitively played a second theme that suggested the work's Armenian folk roots.

Atamian's passage work excelled in the second movement. He captured the music's lyrical walking rhythms despite creating a clamor on the keys with a series of breathtaking runs. He played as if he were trying to take apart the piano and re-assemble it again, one hammer, pad, string and board at a time.

Restating the concerto's initial themes in the third movement, Atamian achieved a riotous mix of sound and chromaticism that aspired to controlled frenzy and he achieved it. Was it any surprise that he earned a standing ovation and five curtain calls - the most by any symphony guest artist in recent memory?

Critic: Byline Marilyn Mantay

Source of Review: Solano Community Symphony

Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.SOLANOSYMPHONY.ORG/](http://www.solanosymphony.org/)

Date of Review: March 21, 2004

Critical Acclaim:

The Solano Community Symphony's duplicate weekend concerts---I attended on Sunday afternoon in Vacaville---introduced to local audiences Dickran Atamian, a remarkably versatile and virtually tireless pianist. With conductor Semyon Lohss and the orchestra, Atamian was soloist for Aram Khachaturian's dramatic, dynamically wide-ranging, at times Orientalist, and sometimes discordant, Piano Concerto (first performed in St. Petersburg in 1937).

Atamian played with fervor, power and, when indicated, with sensitivity and warmth. To see him move from one end of the keyboard to the other with seamless arpeggios or vigorous chords was to see a man of action but also of discipline and control. The piano at first seemed harsh in tone quality, but as soon as Atamian began to play the meditative second theme in the first movement, the piano sounded resonant and romantic. Perhaps the strings needed to warm up! When he played fortissimo chords in the later movements, there was none of the early harshness.

The orchestra was brilliant. The earth shook as the first and third movements draw to their conclusions, and everybody was playing magnificently. The second movement, an andante with an Eastern tonality, was calmer. There were notable solo passages by Bob Sinclair's bass clarinet and by the percussion, complete with a lively tambourine. The last movement felt very jazzy to start. Yes, Khachaturian was a Soviet composer who didn't tour the U.S. until 1968, but still that jazz feeling came through, especially in the rhythm of the violins and the fast, energetic piano solo.

Is it all right to begin a review with the high point of the concert? Only if you promise to read further. The Pelleas et Melisande Suite, Op. 80, by Gabriel Faure, from the end of the 19th century, was played elegantly by the orchestra and especially well by the sections and soloists. The flute (Tracy Doyle) and harp (Barbara Tutt) were lovely in duet. This is a sad tale---the fourth movement is a sorrowful recognition of Melisande's death---and the music tends to be slow. For flow and expression, the violins with their concertmaster Eldon Sellers merit special praise. And the French horns had a smooth quality that blended with the strings and added depth to the music.

Lohss is a smooth conductor, and for the Faure, the orchestra responded exactly as he wished.

If there was a disappointment, it was at the beginning. Playing Mozart's four-movement Symphony No. 25 in G minor, the musicians lacked clarity and confidence. I enjoyed the themes as they echoed from one section to another, but found solo notes sometimes off-key. The string sections played well but were wanting in spirit. I left the concert thinking positively: about the lovely Faure and the magnificent Khachaturian, which were more than worth the price of a ticket.

The Solano Community Orchestra's Pop Concert, featuring Jeremy Cohen on violin, is set for May 1 at 8 p.m. in Fairfield, and May 2 at 3 p.m. in Vacaville. The 13th Annual Home Tour, a major fundraiser for the orchestra, is planned for Saturday, May 15. Information about Symphony activities is available online.

Critic: Shari Fey

Date of Review: January 2004

Critical Acclaim:

Some people go through the motions in life. Dickran Atamian is not one of them.

He plays the piano with such exquisite passion and verve that there was not a moment in his concert with the Symphony of Southeast Texas when it wasn't obvious that he brings every bit of himself to a performance.

He doesn't cheat himself - or the audience thankfully - by not living up to his dazzling talent.

Atamian was the guest artist for a wonderful symphony concert Thursday at Julie Rogers Theatre.

His performance of Brahms "Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Minor" was a sight to see and a listening experience not to forget.

It was incredible to see the power of Atamian's playing.

Maestro Christopher Zimmerman led the orchestra in Mendelssohn's overture to "The Beautiful Melusine." Then, after a short delay in which the Steinway handlers struggled to get it on stage, Atamian made his appearance wearing a navy tuxedo, greeting both the concertmaster and Zimmerman before taking his seat at the piano.

The orchestra began playing, with Atamian at the piano bench, waiting for the moment when the piano begins its journey in what is an incredible piece of music, made all the more special by Atamian's stellar performance.

Even before he played the first notes, his fingertips fluttered up to the piano keys, gently stroking them in anticipation. As the music from the orchestra swelled, Atamian physically reacted to it with his body - from his head to his toes - bouncing, jerking and swaying in response to the music.

His playing was powerful, brilliant, and just plain beautiful as he sometimes banged away at the piece and, at other times, used incredible gentleness to express the genius of Brahms. All the while, Atamian maintained a physical presence in the music.

It was a workout indeed and not just in the metaphysical expression of the music. The musician worked up a sweat, too. While the violin section usually favors handkerchiefs for a certain activity, Atamian went for a trio of tiny towels to wipe up the sweat. He was into the performance, to be sure, and weren't we the lucky ones to hear and see Atamian's marvelous performance?

He became so spirited a times, that, as a woman in the audience behind me, said: "I did better by listening and not watching because there were times I was afraid he'd bounce right off the bench."

This concert made it quite evident that Atamian has lived a life less ordinary. The son of generations of Armenian rug dealers and businessmen (with not a single musician in the family tree), Atamian was a 9 year old busy at - of all things judo lessons and baseball practice when his mother suggested piano lessons.

It took only two weeks of lessons for the first piano teacher to be fired and for Atamian to be on to greater things. At 11, he made his professional debut playing with the Phoenix Symphony. It was also at age 11 that Atamian knew that his professional career would be as a concert pianist.

"I had so much power in my hands," he said in a pre-concert interview.

Since age 11, his career has spanned the globe, earning him recognition, recording contracts, legions of fans and incomparable awards such as the Naumburg International Piano Competition.

In Beaumont, music fans were so absolutely fortunate to have Atamian and his great talent before us.

Critic: Jolanta Bro
Source of Review: Gazeta Wyborcza
Date of Review: 20 June 2005

Critical Acclaim:

(...) The guest, pianist Dickran Atamian, who is an original and expansive personality, raised controversy.

Performances of Brahms's Concerto in D Minor so strongly stressing his emotional dilemma, particularly in the first movement, are quite infrequent. With his furious passion, Atamian intrigued, and left no-one indifferent. (...) He (...) also revealed a lyrical capacity, as well as this to hear the multidimensionality and asymmetry of Brahms's phrase and rhythm. Conducted by Grzegorz Nowak, musicians of the Poznan Philharmonic have recently recorded the Concerto with Atamian.

The degree of detail refinement as well as the profound ease of delivery showed that their collaboration proved very efficient indeed. (...)

Critic: Andrzej Chylewski
Source of Review: Glos Wielkopolski
Date of Review: 20 June 2005

Critical Acclaim:

(...) Although in Brahms's intention the First Concerto should renounce soloist virtuosity and dazzling bravura, its performer, the excellent pianist Dickran Atamian, did not bridle his dynamic temperament and told the capacity crowd a very expressive tale, in a fascinating way engrossing the listeners to follow the story. Even if far removed from Brahms's original design, the plainly impressionistic colours of the Adagio's sound intrigued, the rubato rippling of narration, which made accompaniment particularly difficult, and the almost hysterical dynamic surges puzzled. (...) It was only the encore piece, Prelude in D Major No. 4 from Opus 23 by Sergey Rachmaninov, that brought a marked soothing of emotions, which had been strained almost to the level of explosion. (...)

Critic: Richard Bammer
Source of Review: The Reporter
Source URL: [HTTP://WWW.THEREPORTER.COM](http://www.thereporter.com)
Date of Review: 03/27/06

Critical Acclaim:

Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto received a showman's handling Sunday afternoon in the Vacaville Performing Arts Theatre.

In Dickran "Ritchie" Atamian's hands - by turns running up and down the keyboard for dramatic effect or steady on the punchy, single notes - the decoding of its tricky, cascading runs and thorny octaves seemed like Piano 101 at the conservatory.

The featured performer in concert with the Solano Community Symphony - returning to VPAT after his dazzling Brahms No. 1 in 2005 - brought into high relief the Russian composer's noticeable contrasts between the heroic and lyrical melodies.

And unlike last year, when all those gooey Brahmsian chords swamped the orchestra, Atamian conveyed a sense of real collaboration with an ensemble that, apparently beefed up in the strings sections, sounded wholly new and revived. Thankfully.

Interpretively, the compactly built pianist aced those all-important opening notes: sharp, major chords strolling against lush, rising reaches in the strings. Its swelling melody, sometimes dubbed "Tonight We Love," from the 1940s pop song, is well-known, thanks to classical music ads on late-night TV and to films such as "Anchors Aweigh." Oddly, the theme is never repeated, a quirk in the 19th-century piano literature.

As he entered the slow second movement, his pianissimo was perfect and its quiet, reflective nature was mirrored in the careful conducting of Semyon Lohss, who kept apace with Atamian.

As they have been in years past, all the Atamian histrionics - rousing runs, poised passage work, assured intonation - were in play during the 35-minute piece, especially during the last movement's galloping rhythms.

In every way, the symphony matched Atamian's sweep and sense of resolution, from restraint to all-out frenzy.

The symphony opened with Mendelssohn's "Ruy Blas" Overture, dramatic music signaling that the orchestra has, apparently, left behind the regrettable, fuzzy sound that has plagued it for the last year.

The orchestra closed the first half of the program with Schumann's "Spring" Symphony, with the string section notably and satisfyingly coaxing the sweet and tender rhythms from the beautiful second movement.

Reporter features writer Richard Bammer can be reached at 453-8164 or at arts@thereporter.com.

RECORDINGS ACCLAIM:

Khachaturian/Prokofiev
Nominated for a 1995 Grammy Award.

Release Date: 1994
Record Label: Delos International, Inc.

Critical Acclaim: A Muscular Virtuoso Performance

You will remember this performance of Khachaturian's piano concerto for one of two things. Either for the phenomenally virtuoso and muscular display of Atamian or for his exquisitely wrought lyrical episodes. The work is certainly not for the fainthearted-player or listener. It demands a high level of concentration from both, but the brilliance of the work and its performance is totally rewarding.

Atamian is a very exciting player, displaying a crackling energy and stunning precision in the great sweeping phrases of this towering work. Yet he displays a wonderful sensitivity in the central and final movement where Khachaturian's melodic invention takes over from the frenetic power of the first. The Prokofiev work shares the same intent as its partner on this disc to provide a dramatic platform for virtuoso pianists. Again we marvel at Atamian's power and technique.
(Anthony Harwood, Yorkshire Evening Post U.K. July 16, 1994)

Piano Fireworks

...The big surprise here is the Khachaturian. Atamian's playing emphasizes brilliance, rather quick tempos, and dexterity as clean as an operating room table. He uses the pedals, but sparingly, and the result offers unsuspected strength to the Concerto. What Atamian and Schwarz have done, in fact, is to sweep away the traditions of Liszt and Rachmaninoff playing and drag Khachaturian into the 20th Century by the hair of the head. The big Romantic elements are present, but with a clearer feeling for architecture and bravura than normal. The piece sounds like a real symphonic Concerto this way, not just a pompous ballet score-which is the usual effect.

Prokofiev's Concerto is again approached with objective classicism, and more virtuosity than I've heard on record since William Kapell's version. The remarkable thing about Atamian's playing lies in his ability to conquer Prokofiev's spear-and-javelin style so fully, but without banging and slashing at the keyboard. He can get the instrument to squeal and giggle with glee in the topmost register, but even when that's required, one always hears the pitch and natural timbre of the instrument. (For an example, try 7:50 of Prokofiev's second movement.) There's nothing to suggest a xylophone here. Control! there's the key, and Atamian obviously has that in generous supply. Make no mistake, this is major piano playing.

Schwarz has his wonderful ensemble polished to a fine point, brilliant but never overpowering. The recording seems to give to the nature of the interpretations, brightly clean even by Delos' normally high standards. Outstanding!

The Rite of Spring

Release Date: August 31, 1999

Record Label: Delos International, Inc.

Critical Acclaim:

Delos Spotlight: American Record Guide

Dickran Atamian, p-Delos 1612--30 minutes January/February, 2000

Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring

You read the heading right: just one pianist. This is Sam Raphling's transcription, made in the early 1970s, and recorded a few years later for RCA by the Armenian pianist Dickran Atamian. I came across this curiosity in its first release on vinyl and found it fascinating, and-though it scandalized some (a nice irony, there, no?)--I still think it's one of the more enlightening incarnations of Stravinsky's masterpiece. No, not all of the music can be played by two hands--as is painfully obvious in the 'Introduction'--but then, as Raphling argues in the notes, neither the four-hand arrangement nor the orchestra can quite achieve the fluidity of phrasing or the linear clarity of a solo performer.

After all, The Rite was (like all Stravinsky's music) written and first heard at the piano. One can easily imagine those thick, powerful fingers--for such a tiny man Stravinsky had strong, woodcutter's

hands--at the keyboard, pounding out the ballet's glowering dissonances and jagged ricochets. And Atamian's brilliant and fiery performance overcomes much of the diminishing effects of reduced scale and simplification--especially as captured by RCA's ultra-vivid, high-impact sound, in this Delos reissue.

No, I don't recommend Mahler's Fourth Symphony played on the organ or Copland's Fanfare for the Common Man on the Hawaiian guitar--not to speak of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony warbled out by an Australian lady yodeler (I'm not making these up--they've all appeared on CD, as our Editor can testify). But this baby's a keeper. More Reviews from 2000

Program Notes by Phillip Ramey

On the evening of May 29, 1913, at the Theatre des champs-Elysees in Paris, Pierre Monteux conducted the premiere of Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps*(the Rite of Spring). The occasion turned out to be one of the most memorable in music history. "At the performance," recalled Stravinsky, "mild protests against the music could be heard from the beginning. Then, when the curtain opened...the storm broke." The audience literally erupted: there were arguments, insults, catcalls, even fistfights. During the pandemonium the composer made his way backstage, "in a fury," where he found his choreographer, the great Vaslav Nijinsky, standing on a chair in the wings, screaming directions at the dancers. Nijinsky, also, was enraged--so much so that he threatened to lead a counter-demonstration against the audience, and Stravinsky had to grab his coattails to prevent him from rushing onstage and precipitating an even bigger scandal. Wrote an observer, "It was war over art for the rest of the evening."

Although Stravinsky later tried to parcel out part of the blame for his *succes de scandale* to the labored and barren choreography, the cause was the music itself, for *The Rite of Spring* was a truly revolutionary score. In the words of one critic, "never had an audience heard music so brutal, savage, aggressive, and apparently chaotic; it hit the public like a hurricane, like some uncontrolled primeval force."

Certainly rhythm and dissonance make the most immediate impression in *The Rite of Spring*. That this score is also highly melodic has, for the most part, gone unappreciated, probably because of the extraordinary attention which traditionally has been paid to its motor-rhythmic aspect. Even so informed and sympathetic a listener as the American critic Paul Rosenfeld was initially blinded by *The Rite's* spectacular *ostinatos* and syncopations. In 1920 he cited the music for its "grandeur and severity" and as "the completest and purest expression of [Stravinsky's] genius." "It is doubtful whether any living composer has opened new musical land more widely," Rosenfeld declared. But then he proceeded to exaggerate the importance of the mechanistic element: "...The new steel organs of man have begotten their music in *Le Sacre du printemps*. For with Stravinsky, the rhythms of machinery enter musical art....Above all there is rhythm, rhythm rectangular and sheer and emphatic, rhythm that lunges and beats and reiterates and dances with all the steely perfect tirelessness of the machine, shoots out and draws back, shoots upward and shoots down, with the inhuman motion of titanic arms of steel."

When the score was new this limited view was understandable and excusable; more than half a century later, when the music has become familiar, it is neither. Nevertheless, the fiction persists that in *The Rite of Spring* rhythm exists independently, for its own sake. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth, for a good deal of the work's effect and structural continuity arises from the combining of assertive rhythm with melodic fragments. An integral role is played by bits of melody that suggest Slavic folk song but are more exacts of Stravinsky's impressions of such tunes than direct quotations. The much-touted displaced accents often occur in the pauses between these thematic fragments, and the places where they fall are determined by the irregular lengths of the melodies. So, although it is undeniable that the clashing rhythms and high dissonance-quotient of

The Rite of Spring have had enormous, even seminal, influence on 20th-century music, the score's elemental power actually comes from an awesome consolidation of melody, rhythm and harmony with vibrant orchestral colors and carefully calculated instrumental balances.

The Rite of Spring was commissioned by Serge Diaghilev for his Ballets Russes, as Stravinsky's two previous ballets, The Firebird and Petrouchka, had been. The composer began working on The Rite in the summer of 1911 and finished it early the next year; however, the dramatic impulse had come earlier, in 1910, as he labored on The Firebird. "I had a fleeting vision," he wrote. "I saw in imagination a solemn pagan rite: sage elders, seated in a circle, watching a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring." The Rite of Spring is subtitled "Pictures of Pagan Russia" and divided into two large sections, The Adoration of the Earth and The Sacrifice, but Stravinsky insisted that the program had been imposed by the choreography, which was "based literally upon the music." "I have written a work that is architectonic, not anecdotal," he stated. "Very little immediate tradition lies behind Le Sacre du Printemps...and no theory. I had only my ear to help me; I heard and I wrote what I heard. I am the vessel through which Le Sacre passed."

The transcription presented in this album was made in the early 1970s by the American composer and pianist Sam Raphling. The Rite of Spring-Complete Ballet for Piano Solo (published by Lyra Music Company) had its world premiere in Carnegie Hall on November 19, 1979, performed by Dickran Atamian.

Sam Raphling (born 1910, Fort Worth, Texas) studied piano with Rudolph Ganz at the Chicago Musical College. As a pianist he played with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Arturo Toscanini, Frederick Stock and Sergei Rachmaninoff. Essentially self-taught as a composer, Mr. Raphling has written several operas; four symphonies; five piano concertos; concertos for harp, trumpet, timpani, marimba, and violin; a Rhapsody for Ondes Martenot and Orchestra; eight piano sonatas and many other piano works; sonatas for almost every instrument with piano, and numerous songs. His most recent compositions (1980) are a Fantasy for Piano, Woodwinds and Bass and a one-act opera, La Diva.

The following is excerpted from a tape-recorded conversation between Phillip Ramey and Sam Raphling.

Why transcribe Stravinsky's Rite of Spring for solo piano?

To add something to the solo piano repertory that hadn't previously existed. In our century, aside from Debussy and Ravel, there is very little programmatic music for piano, and I think the piano needs programmatic literature.

In 1921 Stravinsky himself arranged portions of another of his ballets, Petrouchka, for piano, for Arthur Rubinstein, under the title Three Scenes from "Perouchka." His aim, he said, "was to provide piano virtuosi with a piece having sufficient scope to enable them to add to their modern repertory and display their technique."

That was my goal with The Rite of Spring: a virtuoso piece. I was also aware that a solo piano version could be useful for conductors and music students-conductors because being able to play it through at the piano at whatever level of proficiency would be a great learning aid; students because playing at it would be a good way to get the feeling of the music, to become aware of its construction and melodic lines. I think the four-hand piano version of The Rite of Spring that was made by Stravinsky is thick and unwieldy. It seems too much like orchestral music played on the piano-which is exactly what it is. (Stravinsky's other piano music, except for the Petrouchka suite, is not virtuoso music, and pianists seldom play it.)

The rhythmic aspect of The Rite of Spring is so spectacular and, in its day, was so revolutionary that it has tended to obscure the fact that this music is really intensely melodic.

That's quite true. I think the melodic part is clearer to the listener in this piano transcription than in either the original orchestral version or the four-hand version, because the music is stripped to its fundamental elements, and there is always a discernible line.

Do you, then, think of your transcription as being leaner than the orchestral score?

Not when it's played all-out by a gutsy yet poetic pianist like Dickran Atamian. In that kind of performance it sounds as if it's all there, and yet the lines seem clear. The real advantage is that a virtuoso pianist can interpret the music with considerable flexibility and rubato, which is difficult for an orchestra to do because it seldom has enough rehearsal time.

Considering how complex Stravinsky's orchestration often is in The Rite of Spring and the fact that a pianist has only two hands, you must sometimes have found it necessary to make judicious excisions.

I kept as much as I could of the orchestral score, but yes, there were a few places where I had to leave out things. For instance, at the opening there is a lot of counterpoint that was just not possible to fully transcribe. What I did there was to suggest a line, then leave it for another line in such a fashion that the ear has the impression the first line is still going on. Creating that kind of illusion is a device that can work on the piano but, of course, would not work in the orchestra. But writing for piano is a form of orchestration, and transcribing orchestral music for piano is even more so, for you have to think in terms of colors, registers, creating accents through register changes, and so on. Anyone who did such an arrangement would almost of necessity have to be a pianist himself, to know all the little details that make the piano "sound."

Piano transcriptions, especially the sort of paraphrases and elaborations that Liszt and Busoni did, have been out-of-vogue for some time now. But my transcription of The Rite of Spring is quite literal every measure of the ballet is there, almost exactly as originally written, with, as far as possible, the same chord-spacing. You know, in the old days, when an oil painting was finished, it often happened that someone would make a black-and-white engraving which would facilitate the general public's understanding of the contents of the original work of art. Although I certainly don't consider my transcription a black-and-white version of the music, I think there is an analogy because musicians always like to get behind the notes of a score to see what makes it tick.

To expose the bones, so to speak.

Exactly. After all, Stravinsky's Rite of Spring is one of the most innovative musical works of this century, so there is real value in being able to do this. However, more than anything else, I wanted to create here a virtuoso piano piece for concert performance.