

## *Her gown and her violin work magic*

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In an interview several years ago, Sarah Chang remarked that she was aware of the “visual impact” she could produce at a concert by her choice of an attractive gown, thereby adding to audience enjoyment of an Occasion.

On Friday night, playing the Brahms Violin Concerto with the Madison Symphony Orchestra in Overture Hall, Chang emphatically added to the evening’s pleasure with her choice of a lovely, strapless, flowing, floor-length gown accented by a black, lacy bodice.

It helped that she played the concerto beautifully. While playing, she glided about in her restricted area next to guest conductor Anu Tali. In addition, she was so engrossed in the music that when she wasn’t playing — not often in this 40-minute piece — she swayed to the orchestral melody. A lot of visual impact there. As should be expected from this gifted performer, there was clean and polished playing, rhythmic flexibility, a lean tone with a bite to the strings, controlled virtuosity in a variety of difficult passages, and a certain indefinable panache.

In recordings, the violin soloist almost always has closer miking, which tends to minimize, even if slightly in the best recordings, the orchestral accompaniment. In a live performance, the orchestra becomes a more integral part of the performance. In this case, the orchestra played well enough for the most part but was not quite as sharp as it could be. The little faltering or false note here and there surely will be touched up in the repeats of this concert at 8 p.m. Saturday and 2:30 p.m. Sunday.

It is worth noting that in 2004 Chang was the soloist in the Dvorak Violin Concerto in the last MSO concert in the old Oscar Mayer Theatre, before the move to the new Overture Hall. It is also worth noting that Chang, 27, has been performing with major orchestras of the world for 18 years now. A remarkable talent.

Tali, a slim, small young woman with presence (of course) on the podium and a vigorous conducting manner, with sweeping gestures with and without baton, consistently swaying from side to side, had the orchestra in fine form in three other works.

That was true most notably in the quirky, mostly bright, often hectic Shostakovich 9th Symphony. Lots of soloist opportunities, among which should be mentioned the brilliant sound of Joanna Messer’s piccolo leading the first movement and popping up throughout the work, and Cynthia Cameron-Fix’s sonorous extended bassoon work in the brief fourth movement.

The brash finale, with big brass sound, hard-driven percussion, and accelerating pace, was impressive. Another mostly frantic work, first time heard by everyone in the audience, I would guess, including me, was that of Tali’s fellow Estonian, Veljo Tormis, a 10-minute “Overture No. 2,” that poured on the percussion and brass, and concluded with a triple cacophonous explosion.

A slower, melodic inner part was sandwiched by the helter-skelter.

The opener was Barber’s Overture to “The School for Scandal,” also a work that has a jaunty, percussive end.