

**Madison Symphony Orchestra: Daniel Hege,
Henning Kraggerud, and James DeVita**
Good things come in threes

Isthmus

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Henning Kraggerud (above) and James DeVita (below) were two of the treats at the first MSO concert of the spring season.

Three guests brought a triple-treat at the Madison Symphony Orchestra concerts last weekend.

Syracuse Symphony conductor Daniel Hege, making his second podium visit here, opened things with Mozart's "Paris Symphony", No. 31 in D, a frothy first treat. Despite a slightly reduced string band, the orchestral sound was rather heavy. Still, Hege drew from the players crisp, generally very precise articulation, in a carefully shaped interpretation.

The second guest brought the second treat. In his Madison debut, Norwegian violinist Henning Kraggerud bravely chose Sibelius' uniquely brooding and difficult "Violin Concerto in D minor". Engaging in youthful demeanor and fabulously professional in talent, Kraggerud projected a muscularly bold and forceful tone, which could turn sweet and eloquent as needed. His conception of this music was strong and confident, and Hege supported him with finely honed orchestral backing, powerful in its climaxes, with beautifully blended work from the winds. A superb performance -- among the best I have ever heard of this work.

The third guest and the third treat occupied the program's second half, devoted to music from Prokofiev's ballet, *Romeo and Juliet*, one of the composer's most glorious and richly romantic works. Prokofiev himself took 14 episodes from the full score and divided them equally into two concert suites. From those maestro Hege took seven movements and organized them into a sequence paralleling Shakespeare's plot. Further, spoken lines drawn mostly from the play were interspersed among, or imposed upon, these movements, the better to relate music to dramatic narrative.

Speaking these lines was James DeVita, one of the shining lights of American Players Theater. I have been his enthusiastic fan through his 14 years with that company and I liked the idea of inviting him for this role. Nevertheless, his contribution was just a tad less effective than I anticipated. His delivery, so very scintillating on stage, seemed not quite paced to the vaster milieu of the concert hall. Despite miking, he could not always be heard clearly, especially in some competitions with the orchestra. Perhaps, though, things improved after the Friday performance I attended.

But, ah, the orchestra! It sparkled, it surged, it swirled, it roared, under Hege's finely detailed direction. It was simply magnificent! How proud we can feel to have an orchestra that can respond so splendidly to a podium visitor! And again, how lucky we are to have Michael Allsen's thorough and detailed program notes!