

## **“Exuberant Yoav Talmi conducts Madison Symphony Orchestra with violinist Julian Rachlin”**

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It was clear from the start of the past weekend’s Madison Symphony Orchestra program at Overture Hall that visiting conductor Yoav Talmi meant to make a strong impression.

In that respect he was joined by the other guest, violin soloist Julian Rachlin. Lithuanian-born, still very young-looking at the age of 35, Rachlin chose as his vehicle not a traditional 19<sup>th</sup>-century workhorse but the prickly and unconventional “Concerto in D” by Igor Stravinsky.

Written in 1931 as the initiation of Stravinsky’s friendship with violinist Samuel Dushkin, it officially is one of the composer’s “neo-classical” works, but it is really something of a stylistic free-for-all. While its restless intensity and agile busy-ness might echo Baroque fiddling, the slashing near-savagery of much of the solo writing far exceeds any model. Rachlin met all virtuoso challenges brilliantly, while even, in the third of the four movements, managing some genuinely lovely tone. Talmi gave the orchestral role—its comments ranging from the witty to the oafish—strong emphasis.

On his own, Talmi worked the orchestra to its utmost display of sheer power. The program opener, the overture to Alexander Borodin’s opera “Prince Igor,” was reconstructed by Alexander Glazunov from sketches and memory. It toils to fulfill formal obligations, but its strength is in rich melodies and strong sonorities. Those Talmi etched boldly, in flexible but often fast tempi and by exploiting the winds at full sonority.

Dvořák’s “Symphony No. 8 in G” has long been one of the composer’s most popular and beloved orchestral works. It is often treated as a work of genial, almost pastoral mellowness, as against its predecessor, No. 7, heard so magnificently last season. But Talmi seemed determined to put this score in that same category, stressing aggressive energy and volume, especially from the brass, in a performance of blazingly dramatic excitement.

Not that Talmi neglected the gentler side, for he was constantly deft in phrasing and dynamic nuances. This Israeli-born conductor is a remarkable musician: he conducted both the Borodin and Dvořák works without scores in front of him, showing total mastery of them. His podium manner blended exuberant body movement with crisply precise cues to the players.

And the orchestra? They seemed delighted to cut loose and deliver the most full-throated playing I can recall hearing from them. Conversely, they demonstrated anew how readily they respond, not only to John DeMain, but also to the really outstanding series of visiting conductors lately appearing.