

**MSO excels on Dvořák symphony**  
**Saturday March 7, 2009**  
**Wisconsin State Journal**  
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An interesting contrast presented itself Friday night at the Madison Symphony Orchestra concert in Overture Hall, between the offbeat rhythmic drive and primitive energy that Stravinsky is noted for in his compositions, and the straight-forward, lyrical, lively folk-Bohemian melodies of Dvořák.

Of course, that is simplification, because the music of both composers is more complicated than that. But as a basic description it seems fair.

First—and last on the program—the cheery, richly melodic Eighth Symphony of Dvořák, which has “warmth of heart as its most pervasive quality,” as a critic, Richard Freed put it.

The Orchestra was at its best with the lush work, led by guest conductor Yoav Talmi, energetic and active—so active, in fact, that with his steps forward and sideways he once took a step off the podium, recovering easily.

His energy matched that of the musicians, in the sonorous sound of the collective strings and exemplary solo work by so many in the woodwinds, brass, and percussion that it would be unseemly to single out any single person.

While the symphony has four solid movements, the fourth especially has a grand, unforced sweep that is stunning. It has the advantage of a theme and variations that can be followed easily. After a stimulating and extended trumpet fanfare, a three-note introductory theme followed by a lively melody of some 25 notes in its most extended form is repeated and worked around and pushed and prodded with all of the instruments participating in varied tempos, for more than eighth minutes. Dvořák knew how to write a melody and run with it.

So, the audience just sat back, watched, listened and enjoyed, thoroughly, a good orchestra at work.

But before that, the Stravinsky Violin Concerto, not a generally familiar work, still not a part of the standard repertoire, it is fair to say, but a fascinating 22 minutes of neo-classical music.

Violinist Julian Rachlin, of notably high stature in the world, successfully attacked the craggy, eccentric, fast-paced rhythms of the outer movements and found appropriate but uneven lyricism in the slower inner two movements. Throughout, though, melody is subservient to rhythm, with fitful starts and abrupt stops.

Stravinsky is said to have wanted a less virtuosic approach to his concerto, but that is difficult to believe given the demands placed on the soloist. Rachlin seemed to have little difficulty in traversing the fast-paced and complex passages.

A peculiarity of the concerto is that often the violinist is accompanied by only one instrument. There is even a passage for a violin duet. And often the orchestra punctuates rather than accompanies. Everybody handled the quirkiness with aplomb.

The opener was Borodin's overture to his opera “Prince Igor,” played with rollicking enthusiasm (with minor problems in the brasses).

With less than 70 minutes of music, the concert was too short, a complaint I have made of the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra but never before with the MSO.