

## **REVIEW: Stravinsky's 'Firebird' (Original Ballet Version) by Yoel Levi**

*By Jong Gun Song (Publisher of "Dance and Opera")*

Yoel Levi's KBS Symphony Orchestra is becoming more solid. All three performances at the Seoul Arts Center's Concert Hall showed the same high qualities. Not only did the orchestra exhibit their strength with Sibelius and Mahler on the 24th January at Yoel Levi's inaugural performance, but today's "Firebird" of Stravinsky's proved to be remarkable. The most recent performance of Beethoven's Third Symphony on April 1st also powerfully moved the audience. There is no question that all of the recent performances deserve words of praise.

Figuratively speaking, a baseball hitter of low batting average exhibited renewed heart and mind and hit consecutive three run home runs. Such innovation of the KBS Symphony Orchestra leads to one person: Yoel Levi. He does not hesitate to challenge by programming highly sophisticated works, which in turn appeals to the audience. It is clear that he very much toils for perfection.

Mr. Levi also shows us what an orchestra is supposed to mean—musicians working together in a harmonious manner. If you listen to the KBS Symphony Orchestra's recent performances, you can easily see that perfection is being pursued at every turn.

Watching those musicians immersed in their play, you can tell there has been an enormous amount of effort. Additionally, the conductor has full understanding of the score; through his control he extols from his musicians sophisticated excellence. It is more than simply making sounds; it's an expression of art. That's probably why the audience is also becoming more edified. The number of people who love the classics is increasing. Currently there are remarkable changes in the KBS Symphony Orchestra. Their performance on March 21st in the Art Center's Concert Hall I watched was also outstanding.

That day, as part of the 'Russian series' the orchestra delivered the essence of Russian music by giving a solid, transparent recital and made the audiences anticipate the rest of the series. Even though it was their first time to perform Shostakovich's "Ballet Suite No.1" and Stravinsky's "The Firebird, (original ballet version)", it was performed superbly and moved the audience. (especially the modern ballet play choreographed by Fokine with Stravinsky's one hour long music after the intermission was incredible)

The audience had the honor to be witness of an exceptionally awesome concert.

Shostakovich's "Ballet Suite No.1" began with a tranquil Waltz leading to a sweet and cheerful play. The second piece--Tchaikovsky's "Variations on a Rococo Theme Op.33," which was performed by cellist Tatjana Vassiljeva from Novosibirsk starts with a deep storytelling mood, in a compact, but also calm manner. Vassiljeva takes over with a weighty, deep sound. The cello solo turns the air rich and it's thick and keen at the same time, charming the audience.

But at this time I was wondering for a second how those lyrical and romantic Russian people could rob the Crimean Peninsula, and let the unqualified Adelina Dmitriyevna Sotnikova rob the Olympic Figure Skating Gold medal. But the soft, sound of pathos also takes one's breath away. The tension is always there; the voluptuous and superior play in 'rococo form' also endures, and was followed by a huge ovation. The Firebird which was played after the intermission is innovative ballet music which made Stravinsky a great composer.

This music composed for the sake of Ballet Russes's Russian ballet company's "The Fire bird" (choreographed by Fokine) begins with a sophisticated, tiny echo of a contrabass but nonetheless it feels far weightier. The arcane sound of woodwinds, a still drum, and three innocent harps join. Sounds of aboriginality are heard. Suddenly, through a bursting gesture of Yoel Levi a strong, three-dimensional sound emotes from the orchestra. Sophisticated and powerful music is played transparently--the very sound Stravinsky might have wanted.

Now the viola moves in with a mysterious and dreamy sound. Flutes and Harps together create harmony which sounds like marble pebbles in the sea bumping against each other. From far behind you hear the horn deafening the audience's heart. A fierce and frictional sound of the trombone explodes, brass wind instruments fill the filed with elegance. Yet again, silent whispering enters--Yoel Levi and the KBS Symphony Orchestra's 'Fire Bird' turn it into an important asset to our world of culture and art. Slow, Romantic woodwinds enter; every single facet of the performance is exquisite and sophisticated.

Yoel Levi has full control of every component. Horns make deep, rich sound and suddenly the harps take over sweetening the air. Strings encircle the hall, the strong brass joins and the audience is deeply moved. At this moment, I wonder how Fokine choreographed to this great, solemn music. Then, the performance ends with every single orchestra member's intense tremble. The audience is mesmerized.

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