Sparkling performance of witty Poulenc by Pinnock

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Trevor Pinnock, soloist. Conducted by Seiji Ozawa. Poulenc's Concert champêtre for Harpsichord and Orchestra, and works by Berlioz and Franck. Symphony Hall, Nov. 29.

BY JONATHAN RICHMOND

Poulenc's Concert champêtre for harpsichord and orchestra is a sparkling piece of music. It makes ideal use of the harpsichord's percussive, brilliant sound to make an instrument for which there have been few 20th-century compositions shine in a new light.

Trevor Pinnock proved to be just the right person to extract the maximum wit from Poulenc's music in his solo performance with the Boston Symphony Orchestra last Friday night, and to do it both adroitly and with sensitivity. The clarity and precision of his playing was wonderful, the harpsichord sound vivid and penetrating. The delicious silliness of many passages was delivered with particular aplomb; but so, too, were the reflective moments of the second movement, and the exhilarating fast-paced virtuoso dashes of the Finale. There were elements of Bach and Handel—a snippet of The Harmonious Blacksmith, perhaps—in the third movement, but Pinnock made everything sound surprising and new.

Orchestral performance, under Seiji Ozawa's direction, was tops. The entry of brass in the first movement was as glorious as it was glowing, and the chamber-style combinations of instruments used to in turn provide the soloist company evoked a miscellany of intriguing coloration. The piece rowed nicely, the endless variety bound together felicitously by Ozawa.

There was some especially effective playing on flute, elements of brashness urging underlining the humor of the harpsichord. The melancholic Allegretto drew gripping dance-like textures from the strings, woodwinds casting a wistful golden light through their sound.

The concert had begun with Berlioz' Roman Carnival Overture, Op. 9; suspense was developed nicely in a full-blooded performance. It ended with Franck's Symphony in D minor. This is a work I admit to disliking, but it was played with such alertness and power that Ozawa might well change my mind about it.

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