

The Washington Post

PERFORMING ARTS

Friday, January 26, 2007; C11

Hamburg Symphony Orchestra

With exalted figures such as Yuri Temirkanov and Valery Gergiev orbiting the classical music world, it is easy to miss the rise of an impressive slew of Russian conductors currently leading fine regional orchestras in Europe. One particularly promising artist, St. Petersburg native Andrey Boreyko, brought his Hamburg Symphony to Strathmore on Wednesday evening. If the probing performance -- infused with tautness and clarity -- was any indicator, the new Russians are unafraid to go against the stereotype of super-impassioned musicmakers.

Shirking a showy podium manner, Boreyko lets his coolly calibrated approach speak through the music. He conjured up dark mystery in Mendelssohn's "Hebrides Overture," Op. 26, presenting the harmonies with a spare refinement that occasionally foreshadowed Sibelius. A slimmed-down string section brought out haunting effects and underscored the bustling counterpoint themes.

The musicians had a fellow explorer in the American violinist Robert McDuffie, the soloist in Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D, Op. 35. With a beaming and agile tone, McDuffie plumbed each vein of the score with a strong sense of drama, welling gentleness and folk-inspired zest. The Hamburg Symphony, one of several fine orchestras from the North German port city, did far more than provide simple accompaniment, bringing out a murky earth-tinged edge to the underlying music.

Brahms's Symphony No. 2 in D, Op. 73, received an equally novel account with a spotlight on the stresses and dissonances that go against the prevailing image of the work as something purely pastoral. Inner voices -- melancholic viola shading and gorgeously sculpted oboe phrases -- were balanced against sinuously rising themes from the violins. Yet at the end came the glowing blend and stunningly developed climaxes that make the work so beloved.

-- Daniel Ginsberg