

The Boston Musical Intelligen

a virtual journal and essential blog of the classical music scene in greater Boston

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NEWS & FEATURES REVIEWS UPCOMING EVENTS

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JANUARY 6, 2018

A Percussive and Rip-roaring Night at BSO

by [DAVID PATTERSON](#)

Due to inclement weather, BSO's Thursday postponed performance was rescheduled for Sunday at 5 pm. Friday evening, despite frigid weather, Symphony Hall saw a fine turnout for a young British pianist, Benjamin Grosvenor, matched with a "youthful" French conductor, François-Xavier Roth.

The Étienne Nicolas Méhul Overture to *The Amazons* not having been included Friday evening made an already fairly short concert even shorter. A rip-roaring performance of the Beethoven Symphony No. 5, following the Mozart Piano Concerto No. 21 in C without intermission, had folks streaming out the doors around 9:30.

While the Grosvenor-BSO Mozart did not bring the near-full hall to its feet, the Roth-BSO Beethoven did. For some reason or another, the piano often appeared "tinny." Could it have been percussiveness from the prodigious 26-year old? After the Fifth's Allegro con brio, a "Phew!" was audible enough to enjoy. An energized Roth had the orchestra going at a feverish clip most likely never heard before by most, if not all, of us.

All of K. 467 sounded big, the Andante did too. And in this middle movement there was enough respite, relatively speaking. Benjamin Grosvenor's impeccably controlled touch eschewed bell-like tones, favored by others, for forthrightness, especially in rounding off the phrase's zenith.

In the outer movements, Grosvenor's penetrating focus contrasted oddly with François-Xavier Roth's noticeable actions on the podium. When not playing, the young pianist's gaze was upon the orchestra. Balance between the two a finer point of the performance.

Striking were the driving bass and iridescent treble probes from Grosvenor. The overcast cadenza posed a departure from the prevailing optimism of the Allegro maestoso. With utmost precision, the Allegro vivace assai motored on shifting classical gears in high performance rondo-finale fashion.

And at concert's end, after the Beethoven, whose tempos may well qualify for the Guinness Book of Records, it took some doing to reexamine the experience of that stately Mozart.

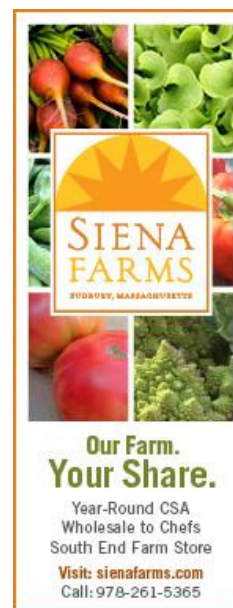
Wishing I had clocked the famous—and infamous—Fifth's opening movement, this listener would have then offered here real-time evidence. As to François-Xavier Roth's approach, was it radical, adventurous, high-speed orchestral delivery, or just what?

In a welcoming heart-to-heart prior to the start of the concert, William R. Hudgins, Principal Clarinet, affirmed the pleasure and satisfaction from performing the Fifth after so many years and iterations. That had to be all the more evident in Boston Symphony Orchestra's amazing accomplishment with this Beethoven, play as they did.

Breathless and in wonder we sat awaiting the Andante con moto. The cellos picked up the theme of this set of variations posing a pronounced melodic contour equal to the tempo, itself picked up. The woodwinds were as fleeting as they were luminous to be savored every note of the way—know that the listener was summoned to her and his toes at every turn. The brass victory processions finalizing each variation were, instead, sharp-edged fanfares.

But they were beauty-blazing full out in the final Allegro movement where resistance of any kind was overwhelmed with outrageous wonderment. The horns, with their full-bodied declarations, and trumpets' jazz inspired brilliance were a knock-out. Why was the BSO doing the Fifth again? That question was fully answered!

Did you know, that on Casual Fridays, as Hudgins suggested, that you could follow the concerto and symphony program notes on your cell phone or tablet right there in designated areas in Symphony Hall as the music was being played? With this Fifth, could you—would you?



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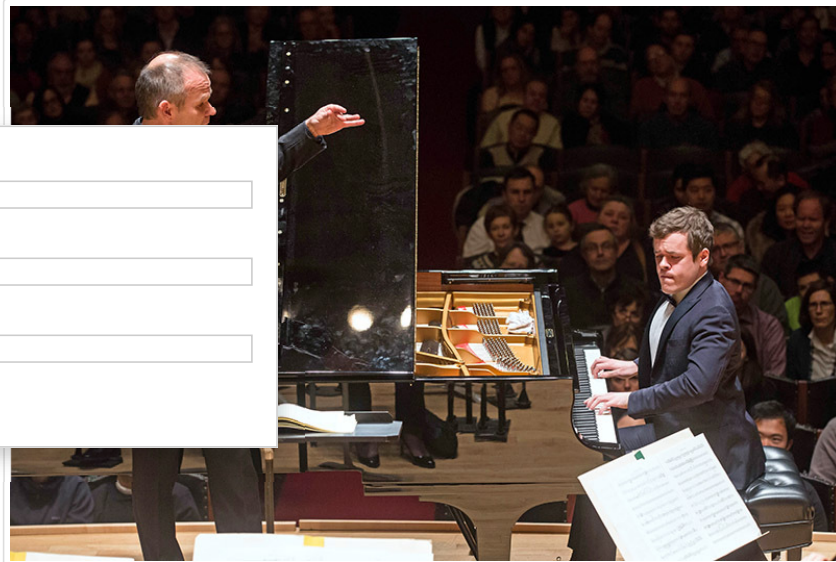
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François-Xavier Roth conducts BSO and Benjamin Grosvenor (Aram Boghosian photo)

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