

Stamford Symphony's performance of Kalabis work was moving, eloquent

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The pair of concerts that concluded the Stamford Symphony's season last weekend at the Palace Theatre were far more than musical expression of highest attainment.

They made an eloquent statement about human experience, its moments of pain, trials and non-resolutions, about Kosovo and the killings in Colorado, about the fundamental brotherhood of all mankind.

REVIEW

The focal point was the American premiere of music by Viktor Kalabis, probably unknown to almost everyone in the audience.

It was his third symphony, written in the early 1970s to protest Communist suppression in Czechoslovakia.

A political statement? No way! It was a poignant expression of human suffering by a first-class composer who possibly has created one of the most moving works of our time. If you were there, you might understand that this is not hyperbole.

One listened with tears in the eyes. How many contemporary works can produce this emotion? Kalabis, 76, a gentle little man, was at the concert and spoke quietly about his music after an introduction by the Czech ambassador to the United States, Alexandr Vondra.

It really was unimportant that not every word could be understood. He talked about the symphony's first statement of anguish, its consequent mood of defiance and striving, then the final resignation that truth can be suppressed again and again.

Conductor Roger Nierenberg and the orchestra took this music to heart and gave it their all. The expressive intervals of the first movement, always trying new patterns that suggest the horror of the situation; the searing sonorities of rage from brass and percussion of the middle movement; and the ultimate despair of the finale, still trying somehow to find a solution — any solution — were expressed with

deep emotion.

Kalabis is a dramatist as well as a symphonist of rare perception. He knows just how much to say, how to make his point and then move on to another mood. He does not repeat himself.

The achievement of understanding, of penetration to the essence of the music, and the skill of executing it with such eloquence by Nierenberg and his musicians is not to be understated.

The concert opened with a great Czech work, Smetana's "The Moldau," a melodious tone poem that lifts the heart with its captivating scenes of a great river and the many events that take place upon its banks. The orchestra was on a roll, and the performance was exceptional.

After intermission came Pamela Frank as soloist in the Beethoven Violin Concerto. For some of us, this piece, a staple of our musical diet, is almost to be avoided, to be listened to only in rare moods of greatest receptivity.

Frank has always been an artist of unusual perception. She is the daughter of two distinguished musicians, trained by the best teachers, immersed in the great Marlboro tradition of chamber music.

Now she has come fully into her own. Her performance of the Beethoven concerto brought back all the magic of this great work, restoring it to its original wonder.

Her communication with the orchestra was inspiring. She played the Joachim cadenzas with extraordinary conviction and skill.

Every moment was filled with rapture and love. She knew how to shape each phrase with fantasy, moving along where it needs motion, holding back where it calls for reflection, soaring with wonderful tenderness to its ecstatic upper extremities, finding exactly the right note of fierceness or playfulness, in short, penetrating to its soul.

Nierenberg did many wonderful things as well, and the orchestra played with a warmth and conviction that left nothing to be desired. This listener cannot think of a more inspiring performance.