

Colorado Springs Philharmonic Orchestra's "Double and Triple" ©

By Connie J. Schlosberg

I must admit I was a little nervous about attending the Colorado Springs Philharmonic Orchestra's performance "Double and Triple" featuring Ani Aznavoorian, a brilliant young cellist, and her husband Stefan Milenkovich, an outstanding violinist. Maestro Lawrence Leighton Smith would wear two hats: conducting the symphony and playing piano. I've never seen a professional orchestra live and I wasn't too sure what to expect. I wondered what the distinguished and obviously older concert attendees would think of me - the novice - sitting in the balcony wondering when it was proper to clap. The orchestra loomed underneath me. The stage was barren except for the musicians, donned in black with their appropriate instruments, chairs and music sheets. When the lights dimmed, I felt more comfortable in my skin. The orchestra's executive director, Susan Greene, approached the stage to kick off its fifth season. She thanked the season ticket holders for keeping the symphony alive for five seasons now. The Colorado Springs Philharmonic orchestra has had hardships with staying afloat and almost closed its doors for good a few years back. She encouraged us to become season ticket holders and that there would be volunteers in the lobby to help us with purchases.

They presented two great concertos. Ms. Aznavoorian and Mr. Milenkovich played Brahms *Concerto in A Minor for Violin and Violoncello* [which I didn't realize is the proper name for cello],, *Op. 102 (Double Concerto)*. The composition consisted of three movements: Allegro, Andante, and Vivace non troppo. For the second act, Maestro Smith joined them on the piano for Beethoven's *Concerto in C Major for Violin, Violoncello and Piano, Op. 60 (Triple Concerto)*. This piece had three movements as well: Allegro, Largo, and Rondo alla polacca. This masterpiece had depth and power and the balance and contrast of the three solo instruments demanded more concentrated listening on my behalf. Brilliant and charming, Richard Strauss' *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks* added a wonderful orchestral beginning to the program.

The *Double Concerto* opened with a delightful cello cadenza and set the tone for a romantic sounding experience. The cello had a rich vibrant sound. Aznavoorian appeared energetic, moving in harmony with her bow. She grabbed my attention with her first solo, which began as a continuation of the orchestra's dramatic opening and transformed the mood into quiet contemplation. Milenkovich had a pure, open sound. The way he handled his violin resembled prayer-like movements. Though Aznavoorian and Milenkovich sounded completely different when playing separately, they came together as one when playing simultaneously.

The *Triple Concerto* featured Aznavoorian and Milenkovich with Smith joining them on piano. Smith amazingly conducted Beethoven's concerto from the keyboard. I watched him perform on the piano with such passion and spirit. While playing piano, he waved his baton in a ballet-like fashion, directing the orchestra. His head would bob fiercely to the music. It was certainly the entertaining highlight of the evening. I'm not sure if I was correct, but I could hear the different time signatures in these movements. The orchestra marvelously performed these difficult showpieces with simplicity but exuberance.

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Listening to these musicians play in harmony moved me in many ways. The music vibrated through me and I felt transcended. The experience was exhilarating. It felt like a whirlwind ride at the amusement park. I was daydreaming about dancing on the stage with the orchestra behind me. The music moved me in many ways. It sounded happy. It sounded sad. I walked away from the performance a more enlightened sophisticated person.