

CONNECTICUT POST

GBS anniversary concert raises the roof

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The Greater Bridgeport Symphony raised the roof of The Klein last Saturday night for its "Best of 60 Years" concert. After October's stunning opening for the 60th anniversary season, the GBS found more stops to pull out, playing four of its greatest hits from over the decades.

GBS music director Gustav Meier was as brilliant as ever. He raised the bar to dizzying heights and then inspired the orchestra to clear it in a breeze. With them was the brilliant pianist Joel Fan, who interpreted one of the most difficult of piano concertos—Rachmaninoff's romantic Piano Concerto No. 2—with breathtaking ease and striking emotion.

Right from the opening, Fan immediately brought out every ounce of Rachmaninoff's lush romanticism. It wasn't long before Fan turned the keyboard into a dazzling display of fireworks, bursting at near supersonic speed. All without the least visible strain.

In the concerto's second movement, Fan sustained the slow, romantic atmosphere of the dreamy opening with notes and passages that floated in the air like clouds reflecting silvery moonlight.

The orchestra formed an impeccable partnership with

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Fan. Nowhere was it more evident, especially from the winds and strings, than in the last movement's heartfelt romantic theme and sumptuous melody.

The orchestra swelled with the theme, Fan had his explosive piano re-igniting the fireworks, and the audience leapt to its feet with repeated bravos. It was a sight to behold.

So was the orchestra's solo turn in the spotlight with Respighi's "Pines of Rome"—one of the most memorable works they've ever performed.

First, though, they opened with Beethoven's "Coriolan" Overture and its no-nonsense, strongman strings that announced the theme of the renegade Roman general Coriolanus. Then they introduced a softer theme for his wife and mother, pleading for mercy for the city.

The tug-of-war between themes couldn't be clearer or more poignant in the way the GBS told the story.

On a different note, the GBS became the "student body," singing Brahms' "Academic Festival" Overture. The orchestra brought freshness and fun to the robust students' songs. But the treat of the evening was the "Pines of Rome." Visions of the 1995 version the GBS performed still are a vivid memory for me. This

time Meier augmented the brasses in the mezzanine—yes, in the mezz—for an even more spectacular version of a triumphant Roman army coming back home for a victory parade.

First, the exciting, tinkling sounds of the pines of Villa Borghese sounded like an enchanting sleigh ride of audible, glistening snow.

Then, like a flip of postcards, the solemn and exotic strings—peaceful, not mournful—took us to the pines near a catacomb.

In the pines of the Janiculum, romantic strings, dreamy trombones and flutes led us into a dreamlike atmosphere.

We were awakened near the pines of the Appian Way for the full 80-plus-piece orchestra welcoming the Roman troops marching home—powerful, deafening, thrilling as all get out.

So was the entire concert.

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