

NEW YORK CONCERT REVIEW

Vol. No. ANNIVERSARY SEASON

**Boris Kucharsky, violin,
Melissa Marse, piano
January 11, 2008
Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall**

Boris Kucharsky is a splendid violinist. Everything about him is large-scale. His imposing physique makes the violin look like a toy in his hands, an impression reinforced by his effortless technical mastery. His tone is rich, sonorous and beautiful (aided, in part, by his Bergonzi violin), and his approach to the music is direct, straight-forward, and blessedly unhurried, with ample time for loving attention to detail.

Of Russian, Slovakian and German descent, Kucharsky was born in Germany in 1971 and began to play the violin when he was seven. Yehudi Menuhin, whose School he entered in 1984, became his mentor and then his champion, helping him to establish an international career as recitalist, orchestral soloist and recording artist.

Kucharsky's Weill Hall program reflected his multinational heritage and included the New York premieres of works by two composers personally and musically important to him. Eugen Suchoň (1908-1993), whose *Violin Concerto* is dedicated to Kucharsky, is considered Slovakia's most important and influential composer, teacher

and theorist. His three-movement *Sonatina* Op. 11, written in the mid-1930s, combines impressionism and romantic sweep; its brilliant virtuosity features long scale-based runs, stratospheric violin writing and solos for both instruments. The slow movement is an extended violin cadenza; the Finale shows influences of Slavic folk-music.

The American composer Robert Aldridge (b. 1954) made friends with Kucharsky at Yale University, and has written several works for him, including the two on this program. *Tango for Gabriela* celebrates Kucharsky's one-time *inamorata*, Gabriela Skrabakova, a Slovakian cress, by using the German letters of her name as musical notes for a melody covering the entire range of the violin in an increasingly ardent love-song. *Carolinian Dances* is a set of (perhaps too many?) variations on a fiddle-tune from Aldridge's native North Carolina, each representing a different style and dance-form. It is modeled on Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*, the second of which closed the program. (Aldridge's work had a long gestation; according to the rather quaint program notes:

"...after several years of being in a drawer, Aldridge completed the work..." The composer, who was present, showed no evil effects from such confinement.)

The unfamiliar works alternated with popular favorites. Saint-Saëns' *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* was a somewhat infelicitous choice: the glittering orchestration is lost in the piano reduction, and, though Kucharsky's performance had ease and charm, displaying virtuosity for its own sake seems alien to him.

The program's highlight was Brahms' *Sonata* No. 3: grandly conceived, expansive yet cohesive, and very expressive. The Adagio sang warmly, the corner movements were intensely dramatic; he was not afraid of subtle liberties and tempo-changes; dynamics, even the problematic ones at the beginning, were meticulously observed.

Melissa Marse, a fine pianist, was a strong, supportive partner, but the wide open piano occasionally overpowered the violin.

The sell-out audience gave the performers a standing ovation and was rewarded with an encore: Elgar's *Salut d'amour*, played to the hilt for romantic effusion.

Edith Eisle