

MUSIC REVIEW

Ma magnetic in ASO concert

BY GERALDINE FREEDMAN
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ALBANY — Cellist Yo-Yo Ma graced the Albany Symphony Orchestra's Friday night concert at the Palace Theatre.

Although he was joined by violinists Colin Jacobsen and Jonathan Gandelman and pianist Joel Fan, Ma had such a strong, solid and magnetic presence that he seemed to draw the capacity crowd's attention. Not that this is his intention. Rather, it's his raw infectious enthusiasm in the music that is so delightful to watch.

He'd dig into phrases with intensity or lean back in his chair to play delicate sections. Sometimes he'd watch the cello or violin section intently if it had solo passages

or share smiles with the other soloists. Always, his playing was marked by exquisite phrasing, rich tones and a soaring musicality.

He chose two of the greatest chamber music works with orchestra. Both required first-rate soloists, which in this case, have all worked together in Ma's Silk Road Project. In Brahms' Double Concerto in A minor, Ma and Jacobsen were well matched and played off each other with practiced ease. Ma made strong forceful statements and played the lyrical lines with subtlety and rich nuances. His notes were placed with exceptional control.

Jacobsen showed a clean and precise technique but didn't get inside the phrases as deeply as Ma nor did he finish them as cleanly.

Conductor David Alan Miller provided inspired support and leadership to an orchestra who wanted to play its best and did.

Beethoven's Triple Concerto in C Major with soloists Ma, Gandelman and Fan was a delight. Rarely have three soloists been so well matched in parts that were written with such equal levels of challenge. Fan was exceptional. His technique was exact; his touch was feathery light. His articulations were remarkably consistent.

Gandelman did an excellent job with a virtuosic part. His phrases were not always finished and errant pitches crept in, but there were magical moments between him and Ma. Together, they played their brilliant technical sections with style, intensity and precision.

The orchestra was buoyant and Miller conducted the finale *alla polacca* with great lift.

Prior to Ma's appearance, the orchestra gave the world premiere of Bun Ching Lam's "To Poestenkill." Lam said the piece was a pastorate about the four seasons in Poestenkill and that for her, happiness equated with harmony.

It was hard to discern anything seasonal in the work or harmonious because of the many gestures and dissonance. There was interest but another title and a different working concept would make more sense. As an encore, the four soloists played the slow movement of Brahms' Piano Concerto in C minor with a lingering refinement.