

Review: Santa Barbara Symphony at Granada Theatre

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By Joseph Miller

Completing his eighth year leading the Santa Barbara Symphony, Maestro Nir Kabaretti has continued to demonstrate brilliance and warmth, high level music making and accessibility. No one present Saturday would doubt the world-class artistry now regularly exhibited by the orchestra, nor the sensitive attunement of players to the maestro's musical vision. Substantial fare included Antonín Dvořák's *Cello Concerto in B minor* and Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No.5*. This reviewer overheard several patrons afterwards reconsidering their feelings about Shostakovich based on this powerful performance — and isn't opening minds a yardstick for success by any measure?

The evening was dedicated to Gloria Autry, the S.B. Symphony violinist who died suddenly only two weeks ago. This season finale was to have been Autry's retirement concert, completing an extraordinary 59 consecutive seasons, beginning in 1955. Appropriately, after respectfully announcing this dedication, Kabaretti led the orchestra in the strikingly beautiful *Akeda (The Sacrifice of Isaac)* by Israeli composer and conductor Noam Sheriff. The first few minutes traversed slow contours of subdued darkness, like a twilight journey.

Guest cellist Sara Sant'Ambrogio was a radiant presence in both appearance and craft, and her virtuosic playing of the Dvořák concerto was the evening audience's favorite. One of the great works of the cello repertory, the solo is fire and water, tough finger-tangling double-stops and high bridge work. Sant'Ambrogio's sweet fluty tones in the upper range were like melodies dropped from above, while her meld with the orchestra was instinctive and seamless. The climax of the first movement proved irresistible to the audience, and elicited a rare mid-work applause.

Dmitri Shostakovich's Stalin-era fifth symphony is a musically and artistically complex work, with layers of parody and derision apparently unguessed by Soviet authorities. Big brass and broad percussion helped deliver the punch of this cheeky-tragic work. And the circus-like *Allegretto* proved to be a superb finish to yet another superb season.

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