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### Hazardous concert voyage worth the risk

By: Kitty Montgomery , Reviewer

Take note. Neither rain nor snow nor sleet nor hail stops American Symphony Orchestra players on their appointed rounds. Friday, Feb. 1, travelers were careening off the ice glazed Thruway in hordes, but these intrepid artists, who mostly hail from Manhattan, made it up to their gig at Bard's Fisher Center.

Beauty may lie in the survival experiences of the beholder, but it seemed, on this occasion, their vast and opulent orchestral body, performing at the wand-summons of Maestro Leon Botstein, sent up fantasies by Debussy and Paul Dukas with more than festival splendor.

Bliss evoked by pensive winds in Debussy's "Afternoon of a Faun" - not your Catskill spotted white tail, the French composer gives us quasi-erotic reveries of a man-goat satyr, based on Stephane Mallarme's mood inducing "eclogue" of the same name - and adrenaline generated by bassoons incarnating bewitched brooms in Dukas' "the Sorcerer's Apprentice", served as antidotes to excursion anxieties.

Angst lay in the conviction, as this pilgrim descended mountain passes, that the ASO show, like every other performance in the Hudson Valley would be canceled.

It was a lust to witness pianist Wui Min Gan ride the orchestra in Alexander Scriabin's Piano Concerto in F-sharp minor that drove us to risk life on this devil's bespat eve.

The concerto was written a year after the Russian pianist-composer made his Paris concert debut, when a conductor advised Debussy, "Scriabin. Remember that name." We say, "Wui Min Gan. Remember that name!"

A native of Malaysia, where he won first prize in the 2001 Malaysian National Piano Festival, and was a finalist at international piano competitions held in Ukraine and Germany, Gan presently coaches with Melvin Chen, at the Bard College Conservatory.

Previous to his ASO debut, he has played solo concerts in the Hudson Valley, where his angel-demon artistry in performances of a Mozart sonata and the Chaconne Bach Partita converted us to fan status.

Anthropologists may find some link where by, through travel and sundry tectonic shifts, natives of the Malaysian archipelago come to share DNA with Mongol-mixed Siberians and Slavs.

How else to account for Gan's affinity with repertoire we have suffered, in the ecstatic sense of the word, through live performances by great pianists of Ukraine, Russia, the Republic of Georgia, and yes, Siberia.

Not a matter of power play or romantic articulation of line, what Gan shares with these artists is the gift for waking a primacy in the belly of the beast they touch, evoking the transcendent archetypal, rather than sharing personal passions. A pianist possessed of this gift, conjures a universal tiger, whose ride and release requires warrior's courage and the innocence of holy fools.

So we see Gan, at the piano before a hundred piece orchestra, attuned to voicings of all instruments, to the intent of the maestro conducting.

In his natural element, he spins the lyric in Scriabin's melodic lines, transparent and ebullient, subsequently kneading massive chords in arpeggios until notes becomes surf, running on sweeping orchestral tides that carry us all to a strata where consciousness is dissolved in epiphany.

Emerging, to a crack of applause from his intrepid audience - we all drove there, didn't we - the keyboard voyagers rises, cherubic in his grace, pleased, perhaps dazed at our mutual safe return from where ever it was he, Scriabin, the Steinway, carried us.

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