

Music Academy Festival Orchestra  
 Finnish Conductor  
**Hannu Lintu:**

# Painting Big Pictures



Review by **Daniel Kepl** / VOICE

**BRINGING TO VIVID LIFE**, through a tsunami of orchestral color and valorous sound pageantry, two of the most explicitly narrative tone poems of the Romantic era, Richard Strauss' monumental 55 minute long through-composed masterpiece, *Ein Heldenleben: A Hero's Life, Op. 40* (1898) and Tchaikovsky's eponymous tribute to eternal love, the *Overture-Fantasia Romeo and Juliet* (1880), The Music Academy Festival Orchestra's wrapped their 2023 summer season last Saturday at the Granada Theatre.

Tall, lean, long armed, and possibly endowed with extra digits on each of his ten fingers, Finnish conductor Hannu Lintu, Chief Conductor of Finnish National Opera and Ballet, wrapped his mind, body, and expressive arms around the task of painting these two graphic musical narratives in a manner that might illuminate and inspire. He succeeded handsomely.

Strauss calls for an enormous orchestra for *Ein Heldenleben* which opened Saturday's concert. Several Music Academy faculty members joined the orchestra Fellows to help achieve the composer's sonic demands. Nine horns, two harps, and two E-flat trumpets boosted the already huge string, wind, brass, and percussion sections of the orchestra to manifest a glimpse into the composer's massive vision; nothing less than an expression through music, of the pan-Germanic ideal taking shape in the last part of the nineteenth century that ultimately became the modern German state.

Though performed without pause, *Ein Heldenleben* does segue through several episodic changes in temperament and mood. Strauss later withdrew reference to specific section titles after audiences began to think the work might be about his own life story, filled as *Ein Heldenleben* is with musical motifs from Strauss' other tone poems – *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Don Quixote*, *Don Juan*, and *Death and Transfiguration*. The hero motif is intoned at the beginning of the piece, the hero's adversaries are musically diagrammed next, and the obligatory love companion is exquisitely developed musically in the third sequence of the tone poem. Battle scenes and works of peace that follow victory serve as denouement to the hero's ultimate retirement from this world and completion of life's journey.

No stranger to the art of illuminating all manner of complex visual/musical scenes in his role as Chief Conductor at Finnish National Opera, Lintu danced and prowled the tiny confines of the Granada's podium, leaning precariously this way, then that as he addressed various matters of balance, color, and subtext in Strauss' magnum opus. During the battle sequence, which contains some of the most powerful brass ensemble writing in the repertoire,

Lintu flung his arms in cyclonic fits on more than one occasion to describe the imaginary scene. The Festival Orchestra responded appropriately, caught in the conductor's overwhelming energy vortex. Making nearly tangible his long-armed embrace of the entire orchestra during spacious arcs of lush string sound, or broad woodwind passages, Lintu breathed in his colleagues' enthusiasm to please, and exhaled with every sinew of his lithe physique and expressive intellect wave after wave of simply gorgeous music making. The hour-long *Ein Heldenleben* narrative flew by. That's synergy.

After a needed intermission to gossip about the epic Strauss tone poem just heard, Lintu and the Festival Orchestra gave us exactly what we needed to wind down the evening, Tchaikovsky's bittersweet yet somehow hopeful tone poem *Romeo and Juliet*, in a performance that shimmered with well-prepared sectional balances, featured carefully tapered and extended phrasing, and focused the confrontational sequences between rival Montague and Capulet clans on the musical virtues of clean articulation and controlled dynamic. A first-rate performance.



Finnish Conductor **Hannu Lintu**



Music Academy President & Chief Executive Officer **Scott Reed** accepted the mic from **Maurice Singer**, Board Chair

Photos by Zach Mendez



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