

Santa Barbara Symphony

Beethoven Dreams – Magnificent Virtuosity

Review by Daniel Kepl / VOICE

A THRILLING DISPLAY OF CONFIDENT VIRTUOSITY was the hallmark of last weekend's Santa Barbara Symphony concerts at the Granada Theatre. Conductor Nir Kabaretti was back on the podium between stints at the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm – his manner and energy bespeaking a burgeoning international career. In the concertmaster chair, a weekend cameo appearance by world famous violinist Gilles Apap, whose diverse musical personality and brilliant mind has garnered him a wide following of faithful acolytes around the globe. He led the high strings of the orchestra with every fiber of his body and most of the neurons in his brain. His personality contagious, the entire orchestra glowed with pride of purpose.

Pianist Inna Faliks, who calls Los Angeles her nest between solo and concerto gigs all over the place, was guest artist for maestro Kabaretti's intriguing program of Beethoven and Beethoven-inspired music. Somehow, she also manages her day job as professor and head of Piano Studies at UCLA. Turns out, Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 4* is one of Faliks' favorite concerti, and she performed it on Saturday night with intimate detail and personal insight.

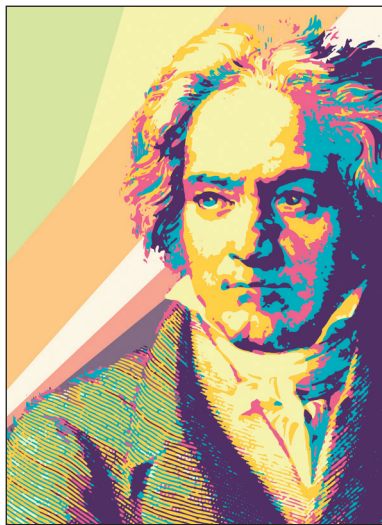
The concert's opening salvo and intellectual pivot point on which the entire program depends for meaning, Israeli composer Ella Milch-Sheriff's 2020 masterpiece, *The Eternal Stranger, A Monodrama for Actor and Orchestra*, (based on a dream of Beethoven), was easily one of the most elegant of several collaborative partnerships between the Symphony and Santa Barbara's Ensemble Theatre Company over the past several years.

Receiving its west coast premiere last weekend, ETC's Artistic Director Jonathan Fox has ingested whole Joshua Sobel's powerful text about alienation, which Milch-Sheriff uses as metaphor for Beethoven's increasing deafness during the two years (1805-1806) he was composing the other two works on the program. Spinning original visual and declamatory magic by crafting Sobel's monodrama into two vivid narratives rather than one as initially conceived by the composer, Fox has engineered a brilliant "musical" affect through the two characters and their diverse vocal inflections and physical actions.

Fox places narrator and immigrant on either side of the narrow passageway in front of the orchestra on stage, their very separation aiding the now more distinct story line. Perplexing eternal dichotomies – good/bad, right/wrong, yin/yang – are made clearer through Fox's directorial choreography. Kudos, Jonathan Fox, for making words physically apparent.

John P. Connolly, in his 52nd year as a Los Angeles-based actor for stage, television, and film, was a riveting narrator of Sobel's gut-wrenching text. Staying well to his side of the perilous argument taking place physically on stage until the very last moments of the mini-drama, Connolly's superb declamations, his labored movements, visually akin to the stress of Atlas supporting the world, made for magnificent mini-theatre.

Los Angeles-based Indian American actor Nitya Vidyasagar has spent most of her career in TV and film. Her theater credits include ETC's recent production of *Selling Kabul*. Diminutive in stature, her character



clinging to one last piece of cultural identity (a drum), Vidyasagar as immigrant, represented choreographically, a visual goddess of elegant resolve.

Thanks to Jonathan Fox's inspired stage direction, Vidyasagar rose over time, literally, from her opening movements of low, even groveling disorientation to the powerful standing choreography Fox devised for her increasingly self-aware triumph over prejudice. Kabaretti and the orchestra navigated the often troubling and murky waters of Milch-Sheriff's magnificently complicated score, with the uncanny ease of professional musicians who know what they're doing. Video projections onscreen behind the orchestra were at once pertinent and visually helpful to understanding the undercurrents of Milch-Sheriff's profound and ultimately beautiful score.

As per Milch-Sheriff's instructions to segue the last notes of her piece into the next work, Kabaretti selected the unusually constructed *Piano Concerto No. 4*, for last weekend's morph. The transition from 21st century to 19th was accomplished successfully with discreet lighting, pianist Inna Faliks entering the semi-darkened stage quietly to play the delicate solo piano figure that opens the concerto, as narrator and immigrant left upstage behind the orchestra. The effect worked beautifully and not without a few shivers. Stunning.

With years of study and many performances of the *Piano Concerto No. 4* under her belt professionally, Faliks has crafted a signature interpretation of the work. Her confident playing, bold and articulate, is also a puff pastry of tapered phrasing and delicate rubati. Faliks demurs discreetly at cadential points and enjoys with delight, the fun of harmonic crunches, especially the sneaky ones. Her cadenzas Saturday night, particularly at the end of the first movement, were a pleasure to hear, as the artist contemplated, then dissected, the art of nuance.

Kabaretti and the orchestra topped the evening with a magnificent performance of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 4*, its four movements whisking by with breezy élan and not a little bravura playing. Beethoven was always complaining his music was not being played fast enough, and the maestro apparently agrees, keeping the pace razor sharp, feather light, and, well, bouncy. Fantastic!

For season subscriptions and individual ticket sales information visit www.thesymphony.org or 805-898-9386.



Guest Artist Pianist Inna Faliks

2023 NOMINATION FORM: Santa Barbara Beautiful Annual Awards

NOMINATION DEADLINE:
Friday, May 26, 2023

ELIGIBLE PROPERTIES:

- Entries must be visible from the street or via public access.
- Completed projects within the limits of Ortega Ridge Road to Turnpike Road.
- Properties within ZIP CODES: 93101 • 93103 • 93105 • 93108 • 93109 • 93110

HOW TO ENTER:

- ON-LINE visit: www.sbbeautiful.org
- EMAIL to: SBBautifulAwards@gmail.com
- MAIL to: Santa Barbara Beautiful, P.O. Box 2024, Santa Barbara, CA 93120

QUESTIONS?

Call: Awards Chair Marcella Simmons @ 805-680-9981
or Stephanie Williams @ 310-385-8700
or email: SBBautifulAwards@gmail.com

2023 AWARD CATEGORIES

- 1. Santa Barbara Commons: Public Open Space** ~ (Parks; Medians; Parkways; Streetscapes): places we gather to heal, build community, and connect with nature.
- 2. Art in Public Places** ~ Murals, Sculpture, etc... (Hugh & Marjorie Petersen Award for Art in Public Places)
- 3. Architectural Feature** ~ (one feature only) ie: Fountain, Decorative Tile, Stonework, Ironwork, Rock Formation, Gate, Tower
- 4. Single Family Home, Small Lot (<1/2 acre)** ~ What sustainable building elements were included? How does it fit in or enhance the streetscape? Does the project have a *LEED Certification?
- 5. Single Family Home, Large Lot (>1/2 acre)** ~ What sustainable building elements were included? How does it fit in or enhance the streetscape? Does the project have a *LEED Certification?
- 6. Multi-family Residence** ~ Condos, Retirement Facilities... What sustainable building elements were included? How does it fit in or enhance the streetscape? Does the project have a *LEED Certification?
- 7. Green Commercial Building** ~ (Public Buildings, Hotels, B&Bs, Mixed Use): What sustainable elements were incorporated? How does it contribute to the community? Does this project have a *LEED Certification?
- 8. Commercial Sign**



Santa Barbara Beautiful is now soliciting nominations in eight categories for their 59th Annual Awards program which takes place on October 1, 2023.

Each of the last 50+ years, Santa Barbara Beautiful has called on our community to recognize and appreciate their neighbors who work to build on the city's natural beauty. At the Annual Awards, the results of their beautification efforts are recognized.

Property award categories have been adapted to meet the real and growing importance of climate change and the need for environmental stewardship.

Learn more about Santa Barbara Beautiful by visiting www.sbbeautiful.org

YOUR NOMINATION:

1. Street Address:
2. ZIP (required):
3. Category (s):
4. Property Owner or Business Name:
5. What makes this a winning nomination?
6. Submitted by: _____
Telephone/email: _____