

## Richmond Times-Dispatch

### SYMPHONY AGAIN PUTS ON A CROWD PLEASER

*Lee's flawless violin on Vaughan Williams piece is a highlight*

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Three musical idioms were placed on display Friday night in the last Beethoven Festival performance of the season by the Richmond Symphony at Bon Air Baptist Church. And a grand display it was.

Along with the Big B's Symphony No. 6, there were pieces by English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams and American composer Aaron Copland that more than gave the crowd its money's worth.

The most compelling work of the evening also was probably the most subdued Vaughan Williams' "The Lark Ascending," written for orchestra and solo violin.

The violinist was Richmond's own Jessica Lee, who came up through the symphony's youth orchestra and, with tutelage by the Shanghai Quartet's Weigang Li, moved on to the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and Juilliard School in New York, where she now resides.

Her performance was flawless in the Vaughan Williams piece and showed her to be truly a virtuoso. Her blending -- particularly in the double-stopping passages -- of the composer's popular yet beautiful piece was a work of prodigy. And the orchestra artfully complemented her in a sensitive accompanying role.

Copland's suite from "Appalachian Spring," for which he won a Pulitzer Prize and is known to most for its use of the familiar Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts," was written in the mid-1940s for the Martha Graham Dance Company. It has become one of the composer's most well-known pieces.

Maestro Mark Russell Smith used the original scoring of the work that called for only 13 instruments, rather than the full-blown chart for full orchestra. It might be OK for the dance ensemble in that configuration, but bets are the audience wouldn't have minded the larger version. And the cut-down ensemble laid bare some minor tuning problems in the violin and cello sections.

Copland is an American celebration in and of himself. The New York native born to Jewish immigrants from Lithuania decided at an early age that he could get better musical training in France. Upon his return to the United States he became one of the most prolific composers of 20th-century American music.

Beethoven's 6th Symphony -- or "Pastoral" -- was the culmination of the evening and showed off every section of the orchestra, as was the composer's wont. As an "even-numbered" Beethoven symphony, it is described as one of his "relaxants" by a number of music historians. There is much more to be said about this, but it will have to wait for another time.

Beethoven we get a lot of. Vaughan Williams and Copland we need a lot more of. And it's there in the repertoire, folks. Keep on coming.