

Refreshing concert from BSO, conductor Mario Venzago, pianist Oliver Schnyder



Pianist Oliver Schnyder discusses Haydn concertos



By **Tim Smith**
The Baltimore Sun

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In his BSO debut, pianist Oliver Schnyder gave a Haydn concerto extra zing with subtly jazzy cadenzas.

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The Baltimore Symphony's program over the weekend, conducted by the always welcome Mario Venzago, offered three items from the orchestral hit parade -- Schubert's "Unfinished," Strauss' "Don Juan," Debussy's "La Mer" -- and a modest little keyboard concerto by Haydn. Who knew the concerto would easily hold its own against the competition?

Making his BSO debut, and enjoying supple support throughout from Venzago and the ensemble, Swiss-born pianist Oliver Schnyder revealed a disarming way with a phrase throughout Haydn's D major Concerto Sunday afternoon at Meyerhoff Hall.

Schnyder's articulation proved as warm as it was crystalline, with admirable dynamic variety. Added to all that technical fluency was abundant expressive character, which made the music sound unusually fresh. Speaking of unusually fresh, the cadenzas took the performance to a whole new level.

UPDATE: When I wrote this review, I thought that both cadenzas were written for the pianist by his friend, Swiss-American composer and saxophonist Daniel Schnyder, whose opera "Charlie Parker's Yardbird" will be premiered next month by Opera Philadelphia. I have heard from Oliver Schnyder that the first movement cadenza he played was by Daniel Schnyder. It's terrific, blending 18th-century sensibilities with subtle dashes of jazz to create something that sounds remarkably apt.

The second movement cadenza was written by an eminent keyboard artist of a now distant era, Wanda Landowska; it was recommended to Schnyder by the the great pianist Martha Argerich. This cadenza, too, contains distinctive harmonic touches that add a wonderful dimension to the Haydn concerto.

As for the rest of the enjoyable afternoon, Venzago took a propulsive approach to the Schubert work, pointing up its turbulent drama without slighting the lyricism. The orchestra dug into the notes impressively.

The conductor drew sturdy, colorful playing from the BSO in the Strauss and Debussy war horses, which unfolded with a telling proportion of drive and sensitivity.

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