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Albany Symphony Orchestra delivers spirited 'Love Letters'

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — The Albany Symphony Orchestra was in excellent form Thursday night at the Canfield Casino as their "Love Letters" embraced a capacity crowd.

Neil Rolnick's new work, "Love Songs," with vocalist Theo Bleckmann and amplified violinist Todd Reynolds to lyrics by Larry Beinhart, evoked love over the years.

Although Rolnick used electronically manipulated sound effects usually as interludes between some of the five songs, the songs were very Broadway in scope. And the vocalist's lines had the same kind of wide range and abstract sense as the best of Leonard Bernstein.

There was a lot of color, snap, crackle and pop and not a little jazz inflection.

Reynolds expertly provided obligatos around Bleckmann's lyrics, which sometimes were overbalanced when the orchestra got a little rowdy.

Although he sang into a microphone, the trouble seemed to be Bleckmann's sore throat — he was probably trying to leave himself something for tonight and Saturday's performances.

On a purely classical note was pianist Orion Weiss' performance of Mozart's luminous Concerto No. 21 in C Major. It was a portrait in delicacy, nuance and beauty of tone.

Weiss' phrases had more happening in them than other pianists do in an entire piece.

He showed color and sensitivity, clarity and evenness of technique, and a dynamic level that was more the range found on a fortepiano.

His first movement was spirited; the famous second movement used in the 1967 film "Elvira Madigan" had lovingly turned phrases; and his final movement had vigor and a controlled brilliance.

Working for the first time with the strings on the floor and the winds terraced above, conductor David Alan Miller kept the balances controlled, although in the first movement the strings were a bit heavy.

By the time Schumann's Symphony No. 1 in B-flat Major began, everyone had adjusted.

The orchestra sounded powerfully dramatic, rambunctious or insouciant in turns. Miller set strong tempos and focused on balances, dynamics and pacing rather than subtlety.

The ASO plays at 8 p.m. today at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall.