

The New York Times



HIROYUKI ITO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## A Foot-Stomping Night at Carnegie Hall

When the players of an excellent student orchestra want to pay special tribute to an inspiring conductor at the end of a concert, they stomp and shuffle their feet during ovations. On Thursday night at Carnegie Hall it was not a bunch of exuberant students but the veteran players of the great Philadelphia Orchestra who stomped their feet for Yannick Nézet-

Séguin, the 37-year-old Canadian conductor now in his first season as the orchestra's music director.

And no wonder. The concert, following Mr. Nézet-Séguin's acclaimed Carnegie debut with the orchestra in October, was phenomenal. The ensemble, famous for its glowing strings and homogeneous richness, has never sounded better.

Mr. Nézet-Séguin chose works Ravel, Szymanowski and Shostakovich wrote

**Philadelphia Orchestra** Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducting at Carnegie Hall on Thursday night.

between 1919 and 1937 that show them grappling with issues of modernism during tumultuous musical times. He began with Ravel's dazzling "La Valse," though he actually had to begin twice. Just as the lower strings, following Mr. Nézet-Séguin's cue, were about to play

the murky stirrings that open the piece, a cellphone emitted an unusual ring tone: it was the sound of a violin playing. Mr. Nézet-Séguin stopped the performance. After a pause and some laughter, he began again. But really, had he stormed off the stage, who could have blamed him?

Ravel, who conceived of this piece as the "apotheosis of the Viennese waltz," described the opening as "eddyding clouds" that allow glimpses of waltzing

couples until the clouds disperse. In this performance Mr. Nézet-Séguin drew out the music's primordial qualities, as if the clouds were parting to reveal not waltzing couples but primitive dancers who had wandered in from "The Rite of Spring." Ravel offers a radical deconstruction of the waltz, and sinister things keep happening in the background. The performance vividly cap-

*Continued on Page 6*

**ANTHONY TOMMASINI**

MUSIC REVIEW



HIROYUKI ITO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Yannick Nézet-Séguin directing the Philadelphia Orchestra in the Ravel piece "La Valse."

## A Foot-Stomping Night at Carnegie Hall

*From First Arts Page*

tured both the score's glittering splendor and its strangeness.

In recent years the Polish composer Karol Szymanowski has been increasingly championed by major artists, including the brilliant Greek violinist Leonidas Kavakos, who was the soloist here in the Violin Concerto No. 2, written in 1933. Like other Szymanowski scores, this 20-minute work, played without break, draws from disparate musical currents: French Impressionism, Stravinskian modernism, the mysticism of Scriabin. There are

*The Philadelphia Orchestra with the conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin will next perform on Feb. 22 at Carnegie Hall; (212) 247-7800, [carnegiehall.org](http://carnegiehall.org).*

traces of Polish folk music but also hints of Eastern exotica.

Mr. Kavakos, playing with an entrancing combination of sweet sound and dark intensity, captured both the autumnal warmth and the restless energy of this deeply personal concerto.

After intermission Mr. Nézet-Séguin turned to Shostakovich's popular Fifth Symphony. This bold and ambiguous work almost screams "major statement." A conductor had better have something to say about it. He did.

In the first movement Shostakovich channels mournful feelings into a Neo-Classical structure. But Mr. Nézet-Séguin drew such intensity from the music that it seemed almost expressionistic. The scherzo came across like a heavy-booted and menacing dance. He tapped into the anguish of the funereal Largo, yet

the Philadelphia strings brought grave beauty to its stretches of choralelike harmony.

In the finale Mr. Nézet-Séguin coaxed vehement playing from the orchestra, with brutal, slashing power and pummeling rhythmic intensity. Was the final, triumphant (excessively triumphant?) episode Shostakovich's ironic response to Soviet authorities who had condemned his music as decadent modernism? This performance was so driving and glorious you did not care.

The ovation was enormous. The orchestra has come through rough times, including a financial crisis and a leadership vacuum. But the Philadelphia Orchestra seems to have found its ideal music director, though Mr. Nézet-Séguin will have to balance his commitment to Philadelphia with his international ambitions.