

# ARTS & CULTURE OCTOBER 5, 2015

## Tacoma Symphony musters robust sound for Russian program, with jaw-dropping Andreas Boyde on piano



BY ROSEMARY PONNEKANTI  
*Staff writer*

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The new Tacoma Symphony pattern of a big, enthusiastic crowd, a robust orchestra and a phenomenal soloist continued at the season opening concert in the Pantages Theater last Saturday, with an all-Russian program that saw German pianist Andreas Boyde romp through Tchaikovsky's second piano concerto and director Sarah Ioannides lead the ensemble to responsive and sonorous playing.

It's a good start for Ioannides' second year at the helm of an orchestra that's getting its groove in both musical drive and audience popularity. To a nearly sold-out house, the TSO tackled both the rambling landscape of Prokofiev's "Russian Overture" and the familiar one of Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" with clear commitment to their new leader, who manages to be both passionate and meticulous.

But the star of the evening was Boyde. With a huge tone that easily balanced the orchestra behind him, Boyde lived up to his nickname "Monsieur 100,000 Volts," rocketing through octave triplets and chordal runs in a dizzying blur. But although Boyde has the kind of hands that can eat Tchaikovsky concertos for breakfast, he thinks hard about what he plays. Instead of gratuitous violence he offered careful shading, balancing the full, organ-like tone of the opening chords with a light, pensive second theme that made a perfect duo with a wafting flute. Theatrically Russian foot-stomps and a conducting lyrical left hand gave way to eye-popping double-hand staccato and a cadenza that left the audience spellbound.

While the second movement was a bit pedestrian (a jerky cello not helping a lovely violin solo), the third was delightfully humorous in a very German way, with Boyde bringing in witty dialogue and wait-for-it pauses before a furious finale.

The orchestra, meanwhile, was, if not quite keeping up, at least responsive, with Ioannides keeping the volume to a tender sotto voce. The unity continued in both the Prokofiev – a sweeping balletic landscape of scenes unfurling like banners in a marketplace, featuring tight, gritty violin work and energetic basses – and the Mussorgsky.

"Pictures at an Exhibition" is hard to play in a dry, dead acoustic like the Pantages: There are just too many lush chords or atmospheric solos needing the kind of resonance that's just not there. To cope, Ioannides kept most of the movements moving along, achieving lyricism rather than stolidity. There were a few messy moments – "The Gnome," and the opening of "Baba Yaga" – but for the most part the orchestra played with skill: the "Promenades" contrasting solid brass fanfares with pastel woodwinds, the strings lyrical in "Samuel Goldbenberg" and jagged in "Baba Yaga," the brass sepulchral in "Catacombs." Some highlights: a perfectly round, wistful saxophone in "The Old Castle,"

precise flute/oboe driving “Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks,” a “Bydlo” that began in a murky legato mist and rose to tragic, march-to-the-scaffold proportions, and a finale that saw the great gate of Kiev rising triumphantly in an incense-cloud of bells and percussion.

And – very welcome in a two-and-a-half-hour concert – no podium concert notes, just some extremely thoughtful musings on paper by Andreas Boyde. During intermission it was also nice to see Ioannides’ whole family, including kids, in attendance.

The orchestra’s next concert is “Sibelius and Mendelssohn” on Nov. 22. More information: [tacomasympphony.org](http://tacomasympphony.org)

*Rosemary Ponnekanti: 253-597-8568*

*[rosemary.ponnekanti@thenewstribune.com](mailto:rosemary.ponnekanti@thenewstribune.com)*

*[@rose\\_ponnekanti](#)*



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