

# MSO Brightens Russian 'Nights'

BY DAVID SALLINGER  
Daily News  
Entertainment Editor

If any teams around here are looking for a conditioning coach, they need look no further than Keiko Kono Rushlander.

The violinist, who soloed Saturday with McKeesport Symphony Orchestra in its "White Nights" concert, proved that classical music is not for the out-of-shape.

Bowing her way through Khatchaturian's demanding Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Rushlander earned the ovation that followed her energetic presentation.

Conducted by Bernard Goldberg, MSO's all-Russian program title might have signified meteorological conditions in Siberia, or one of the political factions during that country's Red-won revolution. But considering that the composers sometimes come across as having been a bit depressed when inking notes onto staves, maybe the show should have been "Red, White and Blue Nights."

Sure, it's fun to have fun with the Russians now that the Cold

War is over, but that suggestion might be misleading. Goodly chunk of the program was healthily upbeat, especially Shostakovich's wildly humorous "Golden Age Polka," the finale from Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4, and the band's happily received encore.

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## Review

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With new concertmaster Warren Davidson to his left, Goldberg launched the ensemble into Glinka's "Overture to Russian and Ludmilla," which was hardly bothered by the candy wrappers being crackled out of time to the music. The opener was a rousing, enjoyably constructed entry.

Remainder of Act I was taken up by the three movements of Khatchaturian's concerto, giving Rushlander few breaks during its 40-some minute run.

Goldberg said he had wanted to build a program around the concerto, joking about how a musically talentless government-

tal official tried to tell the composer how to write. That advice, obviously, was ignored.

Rushlander was especially successful in the first movement in suggesting a sense of longing, though Khatchaturian seemed to have preferred the cello section to capture the essence of that moment. The lengthy violin solo, impressively well played and interesting from a compositional point of view, felt rather long, so that when the orchestra rejoined the fray, they felt a bit like interlopers.

Flashes of urbanism, a la "Rhapsody in Blue" (there's that color again), were dished up in counterpoint to folkier moments and a sadness that might be echoing the composer's reaction to a country under a political thumb. If so, Khatchaturian also gave us the sound of a people scratching to get out.

Second movement suggested impending danger, a yearning, and restfulness. Where the piece seemed to plead, Rushlander leaned toward Goldberg (by then, most of us would have been pleading for a rest). Joy finally entered the picture in the

final section, becoming something like a rustic frolic over-coming discord.

With ninth grader Megan Landfair (eschewing the idea of being red-shirted) seated alongside harp teacher Lucy Scandrett, Goldberg explained that Rimsky-Korsakov's "Introduction and March from 'The Golden Cockerel'" is an example of art targeted by the Russian censor.

Maybe that's why, though its Arabian oasis moments are appealing, the Intro picked up noticeably when its martial moments marched in.

Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise," baring the "Russian soul," was pleasantly lyrical, if melancholy. The polka was lighthearted, kind

of a skeleton dance played by a circus band that's been on the road too long.

Tchaikovsky's bombastic "Finale" wasn't quite that — final, that is — as Goldberg and crew responded to crowd reaction with an unscheduled finale.

The MSO will be "Goin' Home," also at McKeesport Area High School auditorium, Nov. 23.