

Music: The Stockholm Philharmonic

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As the Stockholm Philharmonic played Dvorak's Symphony No.6 at Carnegie Hall on Wednesday night, this reviewer found himself listening intently for some hint of sound or performance detail that might identify the orchestra as Swedish.

Yuri Ahronovitch was presiding over a joyously outgoing interpretation of this radiant work, and the musicians were responding splendidly. But how did this orchestra that had traveled so many thousands of miles to visit us differ from other European orchestras, or from American counterparts?

The answer, of course, is that it didn't. With a few rare exceptions, there are no longer distinguishable differences among major orchestras of the world. All seem to maintain such high technical and musical levels that, by and large, it is only the conductors that make a difference.

Mr. Ahronovitch, born and trained in the Soviet Union, from which he emigrated to Israel in 1972, has been chief conductor of the Stockholm Philharmonic since 1982. His willingness to devote himself to the Dvorak Sixth, a marvelously healthy piece that does not pretend to earth-shaking profundities and is blessedly free of neuroticism, was a plus to begin with. And both he and the orchestra appeared to be having a very good time playing it. Their infectious spirit filled the hall, and it is difficult to imagine that anyone went away feeling glum.

Earlier in the evening, Frans Helmerson, the Swedish cellist, had appeared as soloist in Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No.1. He played the demanding solo part so skillfully and handsomely that one wished cellists had more and better concertos to choose from than they do. Since Shostakovich could fashion a composition out of almost any set of notes, this concerto works on its own terms. But it lacks compelling thematic ideas and- continually busy though it is – ends up as a rather empty exercise. The concert opened with Ingvar Lidholm's "kontakion", a protracted piece said to be based on a Kiev melody. The most interesting part of it was a solo trumpet intonation of what was described as "an ancient requiescat en pace." Otherwise, much of the work was devoted to what sounded like ominous warnings of something dire about to happen. Actually, except for the trumpet solo, nothing of consequence really happened at all.