
From: President [REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, August 29, 2013 8:02 PM
To: jeevacation@gmail.com
Subject: Message from Leon Botstein's office

Dear Mr. Epstein,

President Botstein asked that I send you his article from the L.A. Times.

Best regards,

Catherine

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<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-botstein-hollywood-bowl-review-20130829,0,4204208.story>

Music review: Botstein has last laugh with L.A. Phil at the Bowl

The conductor's hands-off interpretive approach =uesday made for a sensational Prokofiev with violinist Jennifer Koh as soloist.

Leon Botstein =conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl. (Michael Robinson Chavez, Los Angeles Times / January 14, 2009)

By Mark Swed, Los Angeles Times Music Critic

August =8, 2013, 2:20 =.m.

They laughed =hen Leon Botstein became president of Bard College in 1975, at the very =dea that a 28-year-old could enliven a venerable New York liberal arts college. They laughed in 1990 when Botstein =tarted the Bard Music Festival, which had the appearance of a vanity =peration for his own seemingly dubious ambitions as a conductor. They =auged once more when he became music director of the American Symphony Orchestra 20 years ago, especially after some =ocky early performances and scathing reviews.

From what I gather some =merican orchestras were laughing this summer at the very notion of =otstein making his Hollywood Bowl debut. The Los Angeles Philharmonic was the first major American orchestra to =nvite Botstein to conduct. That debut was Tuesday night in a program of =rokofiev and Shostakovich. It was a success.

Then again, so is Bard College, =hich Botstein has made a progressive leader in many areas of education. =o is the Bard Music Festival, which continues to be, year after year under Botstein, the summer's =ost stimulating music festival. And so is the American Symphony, which =otstein has used to spearhead the kind of adventurous thematic =rogramming that many other orchestras are now looking at as a way to remain relevant.

Why, therefore, all the worry, especially =iven that Botstein has had an active career guest conducting in Western =nd Eastern Europe and served as music director of the Jerusalem Symphony for eight years? =e's even begun getting rave reviews in New York.

Part of the problem is that, =erhaps out its own insecurity, America's music establishment has a =istory of mistrusting intellectuals. And Botstein happens to be someone "The Colbert =eport" can turn to when looking for an egghead.

The populist, picnic-friendly =owl, with its large video screens, may seem like the last place for an =academic. And yet Botstein's basically hands-off interpretive approach served him exceedingly well in a =sensational performance of Prokofiev's Second Violin Concerto with =ennifer Koh as soloist. Botstein may keep an objective, emotional =istance as a conductor, but he also had no intention of getting in the way of an intensely passionate violinist.

This was, believe it or not, the =ll-around most compelling performance of anything I've heard all summer =t the Bowl. For once, the amphitheater's many moving parts were placed at the service of an extraordinary =oloist, who dug into the concerto with an unrelenting =ntensity.

Botstein provided Koh with a secure =ramework in which to operate. The L.A. Phil, which had sounded like it =ad entered into late summer doldrums last week, came roaring back to life on a sultry evening. The =ew sound system was more vibrant than ever, capturing the bodily =ubstance of Koh's sound.

At last, even =he controversial high definition video was just fine. Finally, the =olors on screen matched the stage, and so did the luminosity, no longer fighting the music or forcing your attention to go where you =ay not want it. Koh was so worth watching that I almost wish the Los =ngeles Opera would consider installing video when Koh returns to town =n October as Einstein in the Philip Glass and Robert Wilson opera "Einstein on the Beach" at the Dorothy Chandler =avilion (just kidding.)

The big piece Tuesday was Shostakovich's =enth Symphony. Botstein introduced the night by placing the program in =he context of Soviet music. Prokofiev's concerto was written in 1935 just before he returned from =he West to Russia. The composer then had to spend the rest of his life =ontending with Stalin, and both died, coincidentally, in 1953 on the =ame day.

Shostakovich's Tenth, written just after =alin's death, is often interpreted as a bitter reproach to the =ictator. The first movement is long and moody. The second movement is a macabre march; the third, a =eird waltz. Derisive anger bubbles up everywhere. The last movement is =uminative and ferocious. Climaxes hit you over the head.

The composer makes himself the protagonist, using musical codes for his name and that of a mistress. The symphony finally ends with a coda of glee.

The usual way to treat this symphony is as if it were an epic Russian novel, squeezing character out of every extravagant Shostakovichian utterance. Botstein didn't. His performance was adamant. He does love sound.

But he otherwise displayed an element of emotional caution. Without too many interpretive cues or really any kind of cues, the orchestra needed to be very alert. The wind solos were impressive. The brass sounded solid. The strings held things together. The L.A. Phil made it work.

In the end, Botstein made neither too little nor too much of Shostakovich's best but still indulgent symphony. It was what it was, which is saying a lot. And Botstein was what he is, which is also saying a lot.

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