

## Aziz Shokhakimov conducts the Pacific Symphony

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### Young conductor shows his mettle

Young conductor impressive before Pacific  
Symphony

By TIMOTHY MANGAN

I liked the kid. The one with the floppy hair and swiveling hips. He had style. He had taste. He had smarts. But most of all he had enthusiasm, the youthful kind, the hard-to-resist kind. The Pacific Symphony couldn't, Thursday night in Segerstrom Concert Hall. The audience couldn't. I couldn't.

His name is – take a breath – Aziz Shokhakimov, and he hails from Tashkent, Uzbekistan. He took second prize in the 2010 Mahler International Conducting Competition (the same competition that launched Gustavo Dudamel on his career a few years earlier) and I'd like to see who took first. He is already impressing folks in Europe. He had me with the Chabrier. He's 24.

The musical agenda refreshed weary ears, avoiding the heavy German and haunted Russian repertoire for a change in favor of sunny, Spanish-flavored French. Chinese violinist Tianwa Yang, a year older than Shokhakimov, exhumed Lalo's chestnut, the "Symphonie espagnole." American organist Paul Jacobs, a decade older and thus the wizened veteran in this company,



photo: Joshua Sudock, Orange County Register

was on hand for Saint-Saëns' roof-raising Symphony No. 3, "Organ." A perfect dose of Chabrier started things off.

Shokhakimov showed his mettle in the concert-ending Saint-Saëns. It's not the deepest music in the world, but it is not without a certain sophistication (in its first three movements at least; the last is bombastic) and it requires a deft hand to pull it off. Shokhakimov, as the young will do, seemed to conduct it as if it were the greatest music ever written and, rather than overdoing it, uncovered many subtleties and beauties.

Perhaps best of all though is that he captured the through-line of the piece, its dramatic gist, so that the whole unwound seamlessly. It breathed. It exulted. It ruminated. He coaxed a wide dynamic

range and wafted elegant lyrical threads (the second movement Adagio was wonderful) and sought out instrumental felicities. He urged and urged, looking quickly back and forth between sections, rocking on his feet, flopping his hair, stomping his feet.

If some of his theatrical movements seemed designed for audience consumption, they at any rate worked wonders on the orchestra. It caught his fire and commitment, played expressively and excitedly and generally let it fly. The finale did its thing, Jacobs adding the requisite power punches, but it also, for once, held together, didn't go on too long. Credit Shokhakov's expert pacing.

In an extra-programmatic addition before the Saint-Saëns, Jacobs plugged his upcoming solo recital (Sunday) and offered a teaser: Widor's famous Toccata, which he tossed off ebulliently and thunderously.

Chabrier's "España" provided a nice calling card for the conductor, rendered *con gusto* and in all its Technicolor glory. But Shakhakov also captured its rhythmic intricacies with an invigorating snap. The performance of the piece made the audience sit up.... Shokhakov and the orchestra supported [Tianwa Yang] sensitively, though, staying out of her way and jumping in robustly when offered the chance.

It was a bit of a clap-happy crowd Thursday, which didn't really bother this listener (I'm over it), but did seem to bother the musicians, and definitely bothered some of the more-knowing members of the audience, who complained to me. I can't do much about it, of course, except to say, "You shouldn't clap between movements, just at the end," but the folks who break the rule probably aren't reading this.

<http://www.orangecounty.com/articles/shokhakov-50817-audience-movements.html>