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A sterling evening with the New World

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The gypsy violin was the theme of the New World Symphony's concert on Saturday and conductor Lawrence Foster drew fiery, high voltage playing from the ensemble.

It has been almost a decade since Foster last mounted the podium at the Lincoln Theater. His masterly control and unerring ability to cut to the heart of a score have been greatly missed. Foster put an edge on the New World's collective sound that mined gold from the predominantly Hungarian-accented repertoire.

With violinist Robert McDuffie displaying no-holds-barred virtuosity, Miklos Rozsa's Violin Concerto was a blazing tour de force. Best known for his scores for such Hollywood classics as *Double Indemnity*, *Lost Weekend*, and *Ben Hur*, Rozsa was also a prolific composer for the concert stage.

The concerto (composed in 1956 for Jascha Heifetz) is a formidable showpiece. A soaring opening theme leads to a cadenza that makes superhuman demands on the soloist. McDuffie produced torrents of gorgeous tone and brought reservoirs of energy and bowing firepower to the fast-paced finale. His supple musicianship and artistic intelligence turned this display piece into a poetic homage to the romantic era.

Franz Liszt's *Orpheus* was a quasi-Wagnerian opener. Foster elicited both orchestral heft and delicacy from his players. Eloquent wind solos by Dwight Parry (oboe) and Katherine Young (English horn) were strikingly beautiful.

Bela Bartok's densely layered *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celeste* is a phantasmagoria that combines the 18th century concerto grosso with indigenous Hungarian and Romanian folk rhythms. In this exuberant score for double string orchestra, Foster offered bristling excitement without vulgarity. In the modal counterpoint of the *Andante tranquillo*, every instrumental detail (down to the lowest base line) had striking clarity and immediacy.

Warm, richly detailed viola stanzas launched the nightmarish *Adagio* -- the most searing night music in Bartok's oeuvre. During the incendiary devil's *czardas* of the *Allegro molto*, the vivid dynamic and tonal contrasts and inner strength of the orchestra's performance were a revelation. In a season of stellar New World Symphony concerts, Foster's audacious program takes pride of place.