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A solo performance by clarinetist Steven Hartman.

A night of classical Nordic music

On April 11 the New York Scandia Symphony, under the direction of conductor Dorrit Matson, delighted its audience with a performance in Manhattan's Symphony Space. Works performed included Bernhard Henrik Crusell's "Clarinet Concerto, Opus 5," featuring clarinetist Steven Hartman.

What a splendid night it was.

The program, appropriately titled "Under Northern Lights," featured works by Swedish-Finnish composer Crusell and Danish composer Carl August Nielsen. The audience was treated to the sounds of some remarkably talented musicians who performed the beautiful Nordic-influenced music, fortunately heard more often in performance venues these days—and, indeed the evening's performers rose masterfully to the challenge of the works. The tonal quality of the orchestra was refreshingly pure: The strings in particular produced exhilarating highs in the violins and well-focused tones in the lower strings, and the woodwinds matched this quality, producing an overall balanced blend.

I can easily understand why Dorrit Matson has earned acclaim from the musical establishment and public alike. Since the inception of New York Scandia Symphony in 1988, Maestra Matson has opened a wonderful door to these Nordic sounds through such concerts as her well attended lunch-time series at Wall Street's landmark Trinity Church, Symphony Space, Victor Borge Hall in Scandinavia House, and Fort Tryon Park. What's even more wonderful about her and the orchestra she conducts is that they are on a pilgrimage of sorts to bring this music to concert audiences at large.

Maestra Matson's gifts as a conductor were especially on display during the Crusell performance



when she expertly balanced the orchestra and the clarinet, allowing the soloist and ensemble to meld the music into something truly lovely. Although Crusell has been around since 1775 (hiding in the aesthetic closet of some inquisitive clarinet players), he was brought to fresh life by clarinetist Steven Hartman. Crusell's music is well crafted, tuneful and steeped in the best traditions of early romanticism. There is, perhaps, no one better to perform Crusell's work than the very gifted Hartman, the principal clarinetist of the New York City Ballet Orchestra and the Opera Orchestra of New York, and the principal clarinetist with Scandia Symphony.

Steven Hartman studied at Juilliard with, among others, Kal Opperman, the "guru" of the double-lip embouchure. Hartman so brilliantly mastered that and has an impeccable command of the clarinet: displaying technical virtuosity as well as a beautiful and rich tone that he evenly maintains in all its registers. Hartman is technically gifted, but he also gave a sense of melodic shaping, done so well that the lines had a song-like, lyrical quality.

As an objective critic, I know I should, perhaps, point to a weakness that needs attention from the gifted conductor, the talented performers or the superb soloist ... but none were evident.

The performance was altogether flawless.

Dr. Paul M. Shelden