

De Telegraaf (Amsterdam)

Eddie Vetter (tr. Ray Wakefield)

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BRILLIANT MAHLER FROM MINNESOTA

The Minnesota Orchestra briefly graced Amsterdam on its short tour before flying on to the Proms in London. The orchestra is known here, among other reasons, because Edo de Waart has been its music director. Since 2003 the orchestra has been under the direction of Osmo Vänskä, one of many Finns who have distinguished themselves as conductors. He's already 53 years old, but has just moved up to the top in recent years.

The orchestra is in good hands with him. Vänskä is not exactly a "classical" conductor. He stands there moving his arms like a mowing machine as though he were an action-painter and seems to dig the music up into view from very deep under the Concertgebouw. But given the evidence of the resonant result, he has found the ideal combination of analytical insight and emotional surrender. The Americans played Mahler's Fifth Symphony in a strikingly avid and self-assured manner. The phrasing and articulation were accomplished with the greatest care so that some passages gave the impression of being somewhat studied, namely whenever Mahler, lamenting very gently, seeks the limits of melancholy. There the music should be more poignant. But this perfectly rehearsed performance still has for the most part an enormously dramatic impact, especially in the stormy sections where Vänskä and his players sweep you along into a vortex of musical ideas.

Even for the heaviest fare they know how to hold the rhythmic drive. The broad dynamic range is striking. They played the *Adagietto* as pure as a dream without sweetness and in a moderate tempo. Only in the final measures was it spun out, if possible, even more than Haitink ever realized with the Berliner Philharmoniker. It's a breath-taking effect when it's done in such an integrated way.

The orchestra played in an old-fashioned arrangement with the string basses left and the cellos in the middle. Even though the sound of the strings could be somewhat fuller in certain passages, in general this arrangement demonstrates a sound-culture which is difficult to find on the other side of the ocean. Above all, the principal horn player and trumpeter deserve a medal for superb services. What fantastic musicians!

Before intermission soprano Dawn Upshaw was supposed to sing a work which was commissioned for her, "Three Songs" by Osvaldo Golijov, but she had to withdraw because of illness. In her place, Viktoria Mullova played the solo in the Sibelius Violin Concerto with a cool emanation and a stunning technical ease. Her side-steps toward "authentic" performance practice are not apparent in the continual, though certainly superbly mastered vibrato. The Minnesota Orchestra proved itself to be a wonderful partner. Naturally, Osmo Vänskä also knows his Sibelius through and through.