

## ENTERTAINMENT

## LAST NIGHT

# The Russians are yummy, with music to savour

**JOHN TERAUDS**  
CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC

A box of fine chocolate truffles is the best metaphor for last night's premiere visit of the 6-year-old Russian Philharmonic Orchestra to Roy Thomson Hall.

Under founding music director Vladimir Spivakov (who has conducted in Toronto before), the visitors served up some Greatest Hits of Russian Music in a way that honoured a rich tradition while making the pieces sound as fresh as wet ink on a sheet of paper.

To extend the truffle metaphor, each work was shaped by the same elegantly wielded baton, but given its own subtle flavour.

This wasn't music to knock your socks off. Rather, it was a show of fine craft meant to be savoured.

The showpiece was Sergei Rachmaninov's *Piano Concerto No. 1*, played with a mixture of quiet intimacy and boisterous panache by Russian piano star Denis Matsuev. He and the orchestra allowed the composer's lyrical side to speak, while also satisfying thrill-seekers with bursts of pyrotechnics.

In a mid-program encore, Matsuev threw aside the velvet gloves to all but demolish the piano in a blazing transcription of Camille Saint-Saëns' *Danse macabre*.

The program opened amidst the diaphanous, late-19th-century glow of Anatol Liadov's *The Enchanted Lake*. Spivakov carried this lyrical spirit through the Rachmaninov to Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky and Sergei Prokofiev concert reworkings of their *Romeo and Juliet* ballet scores. The overall effect was sweet, but never saccharine.

The concert closed with the Prokofiev, interpreted with a crisp clarity that highlighted every colourful orchestral move in the cleverly written score. Although the music ended with Tybalt's death, the concert was full of life itself.