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Wie ein einziges Instrument – Das El Camino Youth Symphony Orchestra

Like just one instrument: The El Camino Youth Symphony Orchestra

There was only one German musician – unfortunately not from Potsdam – joining the first world online orchestra ever that performed live in New York last year for the first time. However, one of the 96 members chosen online from all over the world from over 3,000 applications was the 17-years-old violinist Hannah Tarley. She would perform Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy's violin concerto in the Nikolai Hall (Nikolaisaal) on Wednesday. Her brilliant interpretation showed the new ways young musicians go today. The El Camino Youth Orchestra which has been in friendly relationship to the Potsdam municipal music school's (Städtische Musikschule Potsdam) youth symphony orchestra for several years, showed, however, the high international level in music even with the young.

Compared to the great Kalifornia Orchestra, the Potsdam one seems to be rather unpretentious. This is true since there are only few members especially in the strings, but they try their very best performing the "Great March" from Wagner's "Tannhaeuser" conducted by Jürgen Runge. It is the winds' smooth embouchure and good intonation that make them stand out again. But there are also excellent young musicians among the strings: The best of them are allowed to join the El Camino Youth Symphony later on.

On the Nikolai hall's stage, there is no free seat left. More than 100 young musicians perform Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky on highest level. The El Camino Youth Orchestra is phenomenal and gives an example for excellent music education: Over 450 students from more than 100 schools from the area around San Francisco play in five orchestras and four ensembles. Only the best of them are allowed to go on tour every second year. This year's tour led them to Poland as well as to Potsdam and Leipzig. The driving force behind the project is Camilla Kolchinsky, a graduate of the Moscow Conservatory and the St. Petersburg Music Academy. The El Camino Youth Orchestra's high level is thanks to her subtle sense for melody and rhythm and her classical Russian music education. She would show this as early as in her sensible conductorship of Mendelssohn's violin concerto E Minor.

The orchestra performed with a maximum pleasing symphonic sound and well-measured dynamic and rhythmic moves. Playing a fantastic solo, Hannah Tarley would soon win the audience's affection. Her technique is perfect, she is softly leaping and exploring the strings, playing silvery, full of vibrato, elegy and singing in the second movement and, in the Finale, amazing bravuras in an accomplished way.

Peter Tchaikovsky's symphonies full of musical finesse are a touchstone for any orchestra. Performing the constant changes in harmony, rhythm and technique, in tutti and solo passages, the El Camino Youth Orchestra presented an orchestra sound at its best. The first movement: like a coloured playground for tunes and sounds, like a sparkling winternight's ball's dream the second one and a masterful ostinato pizzicato in the third movement that makes all strings sound like just one huge plucked string instrument. You don't hear that in the Nikolai hall every day, and the hall reached its modest limits with such a large orchestra as to be heard in the last movement's numerous fortissimi and fanfars. This impressing performance received enthusiasm and was given a big hand.

Babette Kaiserkern