Debut Concert of the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra
Conductor Ben Zander
Symphony Hall, Boston
3 PM November 25th
Part I: Background

All of the factors and elements that figure in this story are disproportionately large – disproportionate that is, to the statistical mean of persons and events, and well outside their standard deviations! They are "Outriders to the Sea" if there ever were any!

This fact (in fact) makes it unlikely that any account that does real justice to it (the story) could take less than 40 pages (single-spaced). This is beyond the capacity of the author, who is very busy trying to find publishers for his 21 unpublished books in the coming year!

The best he can do is give a sketch, more suggestive than comprehensive, of the relevant ideas, issues and events, then refer the reader to the Internet, on which there is more than adequate documentation for filling out the complete picture.

The "Principles" (that is, the 'principled principals'!)

Ben Zander

Benjamin Zander was born March 9, 1939, at Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, England, son of a Jewish lawyer who fled Nazi Germany in 1937. He showed promise as a composer and musician from an early age, studying with Benjamin Britten and Imogen Holst, among others.

In 1967, Zander, already well established as conductor, teacher and lecturer, joined the faculty of the New England Conservatory in Boston, Mass. A creative presence right from the beginning, he's directed workshops of interpretation, organized and conducted the Conservatory's Youth Philharmonic Orchestra as well as its other orchestras, and presided as the Artistic Director of the joint program between the Conservatory's preparatory school and The Walnut Hill School for children in Natick, Massachusetts. In 1979 he established his own Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, a high quality composite of accomplished amateurs and professionals. This is not to be confused with the Boston Symphony Orchestra . To complete the confusion of names, he also conducts the British Philharmonia Orchestra in London. It appears that guide to the acronyms is needed at this point:

The *Youth Philharmonic Orchestra (YPO)*, is the orchestra set up by Zander and others *inside* the New England Conservatory, on Huntingdon Avenue in Boston, MA

The *Boston Symphony (BSO)* is the institution established by Henry Lee Higginson in 1881 , brother of the (word music)-deaf Thomas Wentworth Higginson, best known for having who prevented Emily Dickinson's poetry from being published throughout her life-time.

The *Boston Philharmonic Orchestra* (BPO) is a distinct orchestra founded by Ben Zander in 1979, filled with first class musicians, young, aspired, semi-professional and professional.

The *Philharmonia Orchestra* in London is also sometimes conducted by Ben Zander. They've made some notable recordings together, particularly of the symphonies of Gustav Mahler.

Finally there is the *Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra (BPYO),* the central if not the main subject of this pair of articles. It was established by Ben Zander in March, after he'd been bounced from the New England Conservatory by its president since 2007, Tony Woodcock. Read on.

Zander has also developed a side profession as an inspirational lecturer to seminars for businessmen, the kind of thing in which a speaker stands up and says, in as many ways as his imagination will invent, 'You *can* do it, you know.' Following the tradition, one can purchase tapes, DVD's, books, etc., in which he will expatiate on more or less the same theme. His book in fact (co-authored with his wife Rosamund) is entitled "The Art of Possibility". I've been dipping through it. The book is a bit of a horror, combining what one can only call suburbanite New Age twaddle, with descriptions of the real abilities of Zander and his wife as pragmatic mediators in situations of human conflict. When Maestro Zander relates accounts of his direct experience of working with young musicians, the material becomes truly fascinating.

In February, 2012, Zander was fired from the NEC in a cruel and vicious manner by Tony Woodcock's administration, acting in concert with the Trustees. The decision was "justified" by trumped-up charges even more embarrassing than the normal run of trumped up charges. Like Macbeth, Tony has not been able to stop once he's ahead: this is not Tony's only crime. Some others will be noted in the course of this narrative.

Not only did Ben Zander lose his income and pension (he was set to retire in two next year), but most of the corporations with whom he had

contracts for his seminars immediately dropped him. This was a significant loss of income for a man of 73.

If you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas.

The sleazy charges brought against him by Woodcock and company, based on misrepresentations, innuendos, outright lies, and some patently illegal maneuvers, were serious blows to Zander's pride and prestige. Ben Zander has a big, that is to say vulnerable, ego. He was fired on January 12th, 2012, just two days before the next concert of the Youth Philharmonic Orchestra, for which he'd been preparing the orchestra since September. Quote:

"You are directed not to attempt to attend any Prep School or Youth Philharmonic Orchestra class, relearsal, concert or other event for the remainder of the current academic year."

This series of articles is an eye-witness report of Ben Zander's brilliant come-back on November 25th, when he conducted the debut concert of the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra (BPYO) , (a new youth orchestra formed in conjunction with his Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, just 6 months after his expulsion from the Conservatory.

Peter Benjamin

Peter Benjamin, age 68, is a well-known and respected video photographer for artistic events in Boston and New York. He was a singer with Sarah Caldwell's Boston Opera Company for 25 years. For almost 30 years he has been routinely hired to produce videos and photos for The Boston Ballet, the Boston Opera, the ART (Harvard's American Repertory Theatre) , the Boston Red Sox, Boston Conservatory, and others. His work has also appeared on 60 Minutes, Prime Time Live, and the cover of the New York Times.

Benjamin was convicted of sex crimes in 1991 and went to prison for 5 years. Sex crimes carry a stigma which is often out of all proportion to their actual magnitude. Boston in particular is notorious for inventing or exaggerating them. One need only point to the Amirault case, in which a family of educators were sent to jail for long prison sentences based on evidence oppressively coerced from children, evidence which even the judges threw out as worthless. The legacy of the Salem witches is still with us, especially in chilly New England.

I'm not in a position to judge the seriousness of Benjamin's crimes, but from what I can gather, what he did was wrong, yet also been blown out of proportion. Certainly he did commit the felonies for which he was sentenced. These consisted of homosexual acts with 3 teen-agers, one of them over a period of two years.

My view of homosexuality is that *all* sexual activity comes out of some kind of mental illness; therefore, if you're not at least going to have children, why not try to cure the disease? But this is a distinctly minority viewpoint.

Benjamin spent 5 years in jail and 4 years in a therapy program. He was deemed completely rehabilitated, and has never been implicated in any misconduct since that time. The probation system looks upon him as one of its rare genuine success stories. For five years, from 1998 to 2002, he worked under supervised probation, meaning that another adult had to be present as a monitor. When this requirement was dropped, he himself insisted that it be maintained when children under 18 were present.

In particular he was given explicit authorization by the probation system to film classes and events at the New England Conservatory. Most of the work he's done for the Conservatory has involved

performances at the college or graduate level. He's worked in many of the departments of the Conservatory. In particular he's done work for Tony Woodcock himself! In the conservatory library there are 20 opera videotapes of his.

Despite this it appears that, around the beginning of 2012, Woodcock was "horrified" to learn that Zander was using what he claimed was a notorious sexual predator, to film its orchestra concerts and rehearsals. It is not possible to believe that Woodcock did not know of Benjamin's past. In 1991, the trial was splashed across the front pages of the Bay area's newspapers and magazines. His past was common knowledge among most of the faculty, a large number of whom were working at the Conservatory at that time. Perhaps the most damning evidence of the blatant hypocrisy exercised by Woodcock in his accusations, is that he found it necessary to twist the facts themselves into an indictment, although they indicated the exact opposite of what was claimed.

Woodcock told the trustees that Benjamin had been implicated in another "incident". The incident question refers to the complaint made by the mother of a high school student who'd been hired to work as an assistant for Benjamin on some project. Before taking him on, Benjamin explained to him that he had to be over 16, and would have to get permission from his parents to be allowed to work for him.

This information aroused the mother's suspicions; a casual Internet search informed her of the facts of the trial and sentencing of 1991. She then contacted the Conservatory to ask if they knew about Benjamin's criminal record.

The "incident" in other words, was an example of Benjamin *going out of his way* to guarantee that he would not be violating any laws, and to

guarantee the safety of his young assistant! Woodcock not only insinuated that the "incident" signified Benjamin's return to his old ways, but somehow got across the impression that he and Zander had cooked up some kind of dirty "conspiracy" to introduce him back onto the premises of the NEC, thus putting all of its children at risk!

Tony Woodcock had been trying to get rid of Ben Zander for some time. This was not the first "infraction" he'd used to try to get him fired, but it was the one that brought the board of trustees on his side.

Tony Woodcock

Tony Woodcock is of course the villain of the saga. I couldn't find any information about his age from the Internet, but from the photographs he looks as if he's in his early 40's. Nor is there that much about him, although most of what there is comes up negative. He is much younger than the other principals, including Ben Zander, Peter Benjamin, and Mark Churchill, another ancient of the Conservatory who was sacked after 30 years of dedicated service to the institution. Churchill was instrumental in setting up the American headquarters of Venezuela's El Sistema (El Sistema USA) , a world famous system of musical education for poor children, in the NEC. When Woodcock eliminated El Sistema USA from the programs of the NEC in January of 2011, Churchill had to go, too. At the same time Woodcock has generated publicity, that is to say boasted, for signing an agreement to send 10 NEC "fellows" to Venezuela each year to be trained as El Sistema teachers.

From his radio appearances, on WQXR and elsewhere, one discovers that when it comes to orchestras, Woodcock is militantly anti-union. He's even gone on record as saying that orchestra musicians should be happy for what they get, perhaps shouldn't be paid at all! This may be why

orchestras such as the Oregon Symphony, the Detroit Symphony and , most significantly the Minnesota Symphony (in which personnel/management relations have hit an all time low), hired him to cut costs to the bone and re-establish the bottom line. It seems that , in a short time, wherever he goes the personnel (musicians, faculty, etc.) hate him, while the upper management love him. We all need to be loved. Detailed commentary on Woodcock's attitudes and behavior towards orchestras and at the conservatory may be found on the independent blog "Friends of the NEC" run by students alumni and faculty: http://friendsofnec.tumblr.com/

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A Review of the Debut Concert of the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra

November 25, 2012 at Symphony Hall, Boston

Part II

Roy Lisker

One steps onto treacherous ground in any attempt to write a review of a concert that's worth reading. Music itself is a quality: how difficult it is to talk knowingly about the quality of a quality!

Reviewers shouldn't be satisfied with merely stating an opinion: the concert was "outstanding", or "good", "commonplace", "mediocre", or "incompetent". A reviewer who doesn't quite know what to say, or one who has no ear for music may try to get away with a display of learning

through the inclusion of some morsels of pedantry. If he has a personal agency in some direction, he may allow himself the luxury of indulging a pet peeve.

In the 1980's, when I was living in Berkeley, California, I remember that there was something of a scandal when the reviewer for the San Francisco Chronicle, Michael Steinberg, revealed that he's written a (negative) review of a performance by the Bolshoi Ballet, without bothering to attend! He just didn't like the Bolshoi.

Steinberg, by the way, is the same person who wrote the program notes for two of the pieces played by the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra on this occasion: the Egmont Overture and the Elgar Cello Concerto. His comments on the Elgar show a sensitive and acute appreciation of the piece. His views on the Egmont are in my opinion very far off the mark, as I will show below. As for the third piece, "Ein Heldenleben" of Richard Strauss, the notes were written by Zander himself. They're valid of course, in terms of coming from the person who built the performance, but we have differing notions about the artistic merit of the tone poem.

Ideally, a serious music reviewer is himself creatively engaged in the art. He also has to be a very good writer, in order to be able to reproduce something of the ambiance of being present the concert: if it was

exciting, the review should convey the excitement; dull, the reviewer needs to find some way to get the reader to enjoy reading about its dullness. George Bernard Shaw could do these things without actually knowing very much about music. Even being a good writer isn't enough.

Indeed, an intelligent person realizes that the composition of a satisfactory music review is inherently impossible! For the present task my solution to the dilemma is simple: I will not merely be writing up a review of the debut concert of the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra. I will also, indeed be primarily concerned, with conveying the spirit of an event. This event begins with my arrival in Boston on November 23rd; my stay at the new Boston Youth Hostel buildings in the downtown area; comments on the youthful populations of Boston; the description of a walk through Boston to get to Symphony Hall; human interest tidbits gleaned while waiting in line for my ticket; comments and observations in and about the auditorium; appraisals of the pieces on the program ; and, finally, impressions of the performance itself. Though I may err in every particular, there is something in this review for everybody.

These events were thrilling; the chance to visit Boston and Cambridge again after a year's absence was personally gratifying; residence at the new, greatly expanded buildings of the Boston Youth Hostel was heart-warming; the cold weather, the high winds, and the

walks were exhilarating; Ben Zander's return to the musical scene with a brand new youth orchestra was a triumph; the performance was stirring; the mile long walk along Brattle Street from Harvard Square to the reception at the residence of Swanee Hunt, at 6 PM that night, was charming; the reception itself, the food, the conversations, encounters and speeches, were a delight .

If I am successful in conveying something of the spirit of this cold Sunday of November 25, 2012, then I will not have to waste my energies searching out far-fetched metaphors and learned comparisons in order to describe the effects and affects of the music itself. Generally speaking, it is only through setting the proper framework that the experience of attendance at any performance can be evoked.

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The re-location of the Boston Youth Hostel from the vicinity of the Hynes Convention Center to Boston Common, speaks to the youthful energy that animates this city. Higher education is the primary industry in Greater Boston. In their former location at the intersection of Hemenway and Boylston, the headquarters of the Boston Youth Hostel were surrounded by most of the cultural institutions of this city: a district of schools, conservatories, museums, concert halls, music and art

supply stores, student residences and another one of those ubiquitous universities, Northeastern.

From this intersection the Berkelee Music Conservatory stands a block away to the east; the Boston Conservatory is right across the street; the Hynes Convention Center stands across Massachusetts Avenue on Boylston Street, practically at its doorstep.

To the south slinks Huntingdon Avenue, Boston's cultural nerve axon. Beginning on the steps of Symphony Hall one crosses the street to reach the Huntingdon theatre (Boston University's drama school). One then continues west (more or less) to the New England Conservatory, Northeastern University, the Museum of Fine Arts, Simmons College, the Isabelle Gardner Museum, and the Massachusetts College of Art. Boston University is just a bit further to the Northwest, most agreeably accessed by traversing the collection of parks known as the Fenway.

As a resident of the former headquarters of the Boston Youth Hostel, I could glut my bottomless appetite for culture without ever having to leave this neighborhood. After that I might segue over the Smoot Bridge to Cambridge, there to luxuriate in the wonders of science, which has brought so many benefits to our lives, while contributing nothing to make them meaningful.

The new buildings of the Boston Youth Hostel are situated in a neighborhood of far cruder aspirations, one filled with bars, restaurants, movie houses, antique shops, department stores, concession chains. One finds here a handful of theatres for musical comedies along a narrow strip on Tremont Street from the Common to Stuart; the surrounding landscape is dark and not reassuring. If truth be told, the young college age crowd of the Youth Hostels has never had much of a stake in high culture; I doubt that one could, from the population of the hotel for a year, fill so much as a single youth orchestra.

Their energies are oriented differently. These are the wanderers, the travelers, explorers, adventurers, globe-trotters, sight-seers. Many of them have come directly from Europe, spending only a few days in Boston before fanning out to all points West across the two continents. Recently the Boston hostels rooms have hosted an influx of students from China and the Far East; it is therefore fortuitous that the new hostel buildings are situated at the leading edge of Chinatown. A few steps away from the doors of the hostel one encounters a street filled with restaurants from all the large countries of Asia.

For this post adolescent crowd, the new location is ideal. The sights and sites likely to be of interest to them are all at walking distance: South Station, Boston Harbor, the historical buildings around

Government Center, the "Freedom Trail" and the Duck bus tours, the many restaurants piled up in ziggurats, the movie theatres along Tremont Street and all the big department stores in the vast depression of Washington Street at Downtown Crossing, (aka I.M. Pei's greatest urban blunder.)

There are other long, fruitful walks; along and up Beacon Hill; to the North End, (praised by Jane Jacobs as a marvel of true democratic urban planning); Park Plaza; Copley Square and the public library; the South End and the Back Bay. This, clearly is the ideal location for an enterprising tourist with a few days on his/her hands, someone not necessarily immune to its cultural and educational resources, but who may just be more interested in exploring the heartland of a world class city before trekking across the continent.

One is permitted to interpret my walk from the Hostel to Symphony Hall, around 2 PM on a chilly Sunday afternoon, as a kind of good-will liaison between these two youthful populations of divergent aspirations, notions of adventure, exploration of unknown universes, ambitions and achievements, of the "Art of Possibility"!

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The day began, as most days do when I'm in the Boston area, with a breakfast at Peet's Coffee Shop in Cambridge, set behind a green space

at the intersection of Mount Auburn and JFK Street. The coffee is acceptable, the clientele "Harvard" (in both its positive and not so positive connotations), and the music is not for idiots (a rare commodity in most coffee shops): generally Baroque through to Schubert.

On this morning I got into a conversation with a table holding 5 people, getting their morning coffee on their way to a class. Somehow the conversation got onto a novel by an interesting writer known as "Joyce" (?): "Somebody's Wake "(?) They floated the standard judgment that the novel was unreadable. "Don't you agree?" I was asked. I partly agree; there's evidence that Joyce did not want it to be considered readable. All the same, they were a bit disconcerted when I told them that I'd practiced the recitation of pages 1,10,20,30,40 and 50 of the standard edition of Somebody's Wake, in order to perform them at the annual Bloomsday Festival in Middletown, Connecticut, which took place on June 16th.

It turned out that they were on their way to a "leadership seminar" somewhere, and were delighted to have run into a bonafide Harvard Square intellectual. More of us should be showing up in the Square once in awhile, the better to deceive the public.

Outdoors once again, into the frosty clime! Had the chill intensified there would have be a problem at 6 that evening, if I wanted

to attend the reception after the BPYO concert, in the mansion of Swanee Hunt. This is located at the far end of Brattle Street, almost exactly a mile away from Harvard Square. So I went into the Harvard Square subway station to ask about buses going there. It turned out that there are no buses along Brattle: I would have to take the 73 on Mt Auburn, get off around Mt. Auburn cemetery where the two streets come together, then walk back a few blocks. As it happened, after 5 PM the weather became as mild as the smile on the face of the Yuletide babe. The walk, on a cold yet windless night, past a succession of elegant old manses, historical residences, institutions and college buildings, was definitely a treat.

After consulting with the subway personnel I went down to the quais to take a Red Line train to Central Square. Waiting for the next train, I was astonished to hear the strains of authentic baroque music being played by a street musician, an old man (that is, about my age but who also looks old) on a kind of electrified accordion. I walked over to him: "First Rameau, now Corelli!" I said, "That deserves support!" I dropped a dollar into his box. He nodded, as if to say, "Well, *somebody* knows what I'm doing!", and continued playing.

In Central Square I went to the Goodwill Thrift Shop. There, for a mere $5 I purchased one of the most beautiful sweaters I've ever owned,

white knitted with brown trim of holly, deer and snowflakes. As you can see, when I travel I live in hostels, ride subways, buy clothing in thrift shops, and only go to concerts if they're free. This is because, at an early age, the university system taught me that it was wrong to expect money for anything I do. But we are getting away from our subject.

The sweater was ruined that evening at the reception; I learned this when somebody pointed out that it had become covered with wine stains.

… I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,

And with forc'd fingers rude,

Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year…

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The young man behind the reception counter at the youth hostel advised me that the best way to get to Symphony Hall from there was to walk straight down Stuart Street to its intersection with Huntingdon Avenue, then continue walking along that until I came to Mass Avenue. Valiantly I strode once more onto Stuart Street against a low barometer and a high wind.

Stuart Street feeds into Huntingdon at Copley Square. I tend to visualize this part of downtown Boston as a kind of Moebius strip; my orientation flips somewhere along the way, and I imagine that the

Charles River and the Boston Bay are located opposite from where they actually are. In other words, if I'm not paying attention I'm liable to start heading towards the harbor by walking up along the side of the public library, or try to get to the Charles River by walking down Dartmouth Street! The guardians of the city worked out a solution to this quandary decades ago. The Prudential Center complex, a cathedral to the religion of Consumerism, extends from the public library to the Hynes convention center and the Sheraton Hotel, with convenient escalators descending to Huntingdon Avenue along the way.

In the days of ancient Greece this mega shopping mall, banking and hotel complex would have ranked as one of the 7 wonders of the world. It is too late for that now, though it is still impressive. The cold was tenable, but the wind's pressure gradient and its attendant chill were enough to draw me into this megalith. My goals took me through its several hotel lobbies, up its escalators, through its marble corridors, along food courts and palatial displays of public art. One might think of it as a kind of a skating rink for shoppers without skates, surrounded on all sides by commercial extravaganza, dazzling showcases, the glittering of glass, gold and jewels.

Continuing along I came to a kind of atrium, a circular arena where, high up on a crown one can read all the directions in which my freedoms

as an American allowed me to go. One of them was Huntingdon Avenue.

Once I'd descended to the street level and out the doors, the gale knocked me about even more fiercely , almost blowing off my woolen cap. Massachusetts Avenue was reached in about 15 minutes. From the vantage of the Utrecht Art Supply store, directly across from Symphony Hall, I could see that the east side of the building was sheltering a dense crowd of people waiting to buy tickets. An usher informed me that persons with invitations were being processed at two ticket windows at the other end of the building on Mass Ave. with the words "Will Call" posted above them.

The lines on the street leading to these windows were fairly long, but they moved quickly as we were there to pick up tickets, not to buy them. I found myself standing next to a violinist. This conclusion was reached not by hearing him play, nor because he was humming the theme from the Mendelssohn Concerto, nor because his fingers were moving in spasmodic imitations of rapid passage work, but because he had a violin case slung from his right shoulder. I was not the only person who did not deem this sufficient proof that he could or did actually play the instrument (if in fact there was an instrument inside the case). As we entered the small corridor where the ticket windows are situated, a

young security guard came over to us and told him that his box was not allowed inside the building.

My neighbor was clearly disconcerted; both of them studiously ignored me when I reminded them that the days of machine guns being carried inside violin cases were long past. There was some arguing back and forth between them for awhile, but finally the guard relented and allowed the suspect to bring the case inside the building so that it could be laid open on a table and opened up for inspection; the guard would then see for himself that it held a mere violin (*Hardly mere! Rather, the most fiendish instrument of torture ever devised!*) After being held up for 15 minutes by a woman who kept insisting that she was there to collect 12 complimentary tickets, my own transaction was effected in less than 2.

My seat was on the ground floor, somewhat to the left of the stage, more or less at the ideal place, not too close or distant. Boston's Symphony Hall is marvelously democratic, a great relief from the familiar horseshoe shaped auditoriums with their private loges and levels, clearly designed to reproduce Europe's hierarchies of money and power. It is grand without being grandiose, modeled on the large meeting halls and assemblies of a participatory democracy, with a splendid view of the orchestra, the brightly illuminated stage and the recently renovated great Hutchings-Aeolian-Skinner organ.

The stage was rapidly filling up with incoming musicians. I was able from my vantage to make a number of observations which were later confirmed. It appeared that among the violins, the students of families from the Far East – China, Korea, Japan – were dominant. By reading the program I learned that, of 20 first violins, 12 had Oriental names; between the firsts and the seconds they constituted more than 30% of the total.

Surprisingly, it also turns out that, of the 117 members of the BPYO, there are very few East Asians in the cellos and violas, *and virtually none on any other instrument!* The names in the program listings may not tell the whole story, but I counted only a single clarinetist, one percussionist, and a Euphonium player.

This supports what I've long suspected previously, namely that, apart from the mania for the violin catalyzed by the success of the Suzuki violin method, the Far Eastern communities in the US have yet to fully appreciate the wealth of European classical music. For an entire cluster of cultures to concentrate almost exclusively on the violin, is to be like those concert-goers who only like opera, or baroque background music like Vivaldi, or the piano concertos of Grieg, Rachmaninoff and Tschaikowsky. Music students from the Far East has been seduced by the glamour and the technical challenge of the violin, but clearly nothing

else interests them. Exceptions abound, from the pianists Mitsuko Uchida and Lang Lang, to the cellist Yo-Yo Ma, but this seems to be the general rule.

Also, I noticed scarcely a single Afro-American face among them. On the gallery of pictures on the BPYO's website and Facebook page, I discerned only a single cute high school girl in the second violins. The reasons for this of course have nothing to do with prejudice, certainly not by the BPYO. It is a simple fact that there is very little hope of a career for an Afro-American classical musician. On the one hand, symphony orchestras and their upper crust boards of trustees still maintain a glass ceiling densely packed with opaque quartz crystals; while on the other, from the Negro, black , and Afro-American culture (using a different label to distinguish differing periods) there has come a popular music so rich in character and challenge that it has conquered the entire planet. I doubt that many responsible parents in the black community would encourage their children to train for a career in classical music. There is a remarkable Afro-American classical musician in the Boston area, with a position at MIT, the violist Marcus Thompson. There must be others that I don't know about.

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Ben Zander's entrance onto the stage was greeted by strong applause; not too much of course, as befits a sober Boston audience; this is not Milan. The huzzahs and standing ovations, the howls, whistles, shouts of "Bravo", foot-stomping of audiences forced into immobility for 2 hours and no other means of working off their nervous energy, would come at the finale. They would be moving testimony not only to the quality of the performance, but the enormous sympathy Ben Zander has generated through his resilient reassertion as a force to be reckoned with in the Boston musical continuum.

The program consisted of Beethoven's Egmont Overture, Op 84 in f minor; Elgar's cello Concerto, op 85 in e minor ; and the tone poem by Richard Strauss, Ein Heldenleben Opus 40 in Eb, Opus 41. All 3 pieces relate in some way to the themes of militarism, war and heroism.

To my mind, the program notes of Michael Steinberg and Ben Zander err in certain particulars concerning the historical relevance of these works. For example, one can be confident that Ben Zander, who is constantly portraying himself as a master of compromise and negotiation (the "Art of Possibility"), , which he combines with a front of compulsive optimism that is frightening rather than reassuring, would contest my assessment, but the "banquet of triumphalism" served up at this concert

represented a veritable throwing down of the gauntlet to his adversaries at the New England Conservatory.

The concert began with the Egmont Overture. One is not surprised to discover that it is in the repertoire of virtually every youth orchestra the world round. It is brilliant music, rousing, very programmatic; and it is rather shallow, on the level of the William Tell Overture and the Light Cavalry Overture. Steinberg's program notes would have us believe that it constitutes a passionate expression of outrage at the depredations of Napoleon Bonaparte, who happened to be in Vienna in October of 1809, gleefully redistributing the Austrian Empire in the very month in which Beethoven began work on the Egmont Overture.

But forget about the historical accidents: just listen to the music. There is no way one can connect the executions either of Egmont, or the local 18-year old patriot Friedrich Staps, to this bristlingly brilliant march music. (Staps tried to stab Napoleon when he was reviewing his troops in Vienna. When offered his freedom if he expressed regret, Staps replied that if he were freed he would again try to kill the emperor. Staps was shot by a firing squad on October 26, 1809.)

The Egmont Overture is also something of a self-parody of Beethoven's heroic style. It combines the storm sound effects of the Pastorale Symphony, the brio of the long coda of the last movement of

the Eroica, the dogmatic triumphalism of the last movement of the 5th Symphony, with just a touch of sadness by means of an oboe solo that resembles the oboe solo of the Funeral March of the Eroica. Otherwise he music is , by and large, cheerful; the level of conflict that of a soccer match; there is no blood, certainly no beheadings or firing squads, no cries of defiance, no patriotism. This is good music for a war movie. It could just as well accompany the victories of France at the battle of Wagram, as its defeat at Waterloo. There is no tone painting in the manner of Tschaikowski's 1812 Overture, no impassioned grief at the level of Beethoven's great cantata on the death of Joseph II.

When one investigates Beethoven's own conduct in this period, one notices other peculiarities. In the same months in which Napoleon was over-running Austria and the German principalities, Beethoven was applying (successfully) for a job in Kassel as Music Director for Jerome Bonaparte, Napoleon's brother and the newly crowned king of Westphalia! (The job fell through, being mostly a political move on Beethoven's part to get a better deal from Vienna.) Despite the story of his trampling the dedication to the dictator, on the front page of the Eroica, into the dirt, Beethoven seems to have always retained his admiration (albeit with misgivings) for Napoleon,

That being said, the performance by the BPYO was rousing; how could it not be rousing? It was serious; since the conductor was clearly treating it as serious business, how could it not be serious? There are two adjectives (*the kind that music reviewers are always digging for to "label" their judgments*), that one can consistently apply to all the offerings at this first BPYO concert: "coherent" and "electric". Youth orchestra concerts often deserve the latter adjective but rarely the former.

Let us now turn to the next work on the program, the e-minor cello concerto of Edward Elgar, opus 85. , soloist Alisa Weilerstein, conducted by Rafael Payare. Before proceeding with the review, I want to elaborate a bit upon the various ways in which this tender, melancholy piece relate to the themes of heroism and war. From beginning to end, the concerto is scented with impressions of melancholy, bitterness, nostalgia, world-weariness. As if the key signature, e minor, were not sad enough, it is actually composed in the Aeolian mode, that is to say, with a tendency to flatten the leading and penultimate tones of the minor key. Not only does this increase the sense of melancholy, it evokes the millennial vision of England as a pastoral nation, a vision that somehow survived the Industrial Revolution but was forever shattered by the horrors of World War I.

Composed in 1919 it may be considered a prolonged "Elegy for Doomed Youth" in the sense of Wilfred Owen. Elgar never composed anything else in the same vein, neither before nor afterwards. It evokes a bygone era that terminated in the abyss, yet offers little hope for the future. It is something like a meditation by the side of a grave, by which the mourners reflect and recall the world of the deceased.

There is, of course, a second reason why the Elgar cello concerto (very different from the violin concerto, also a masterpiece) tends to be associated with heroism. In the public imagination it has been reified as the signature work of the late Jacqueline du Pre. To produce it is to bring up the memory of her terrible ordeal of suffering and premature death from multiple sclerosis at the age of 42 in 1987. As the second panel of a triptych framed by the Egmont Overture on one side, and Ein Heldenleben on the other, the Elgar concerto stood out as the emotional core of a program tipped towards bravado, a tribute to the emotional, physical and social consequences of the brazen heroics declaimed in the other works.

Both the conductor and the cellist were above the boundaries (ages 13 to 21) set for admission to the youth orchestra: Alisa Weilerstein is 30, Rafael Payare 32. The program notes carry the silly observation that Rafael is Alisa's boyfriend, whatever that means. It does however

account for the sad looks they kept giving each other, which may of course have only been cues to coordinate the prevailing sadness of the concerto.

Rafael Payare is a graduate of the El Sistema program in Venezuela. As Benjamin Zander told us in his speech at the reception later, El Sistema is one of the most important modern developments in classical music, combining political activism, musical education, performance and cultivation . (In fact Zander said that it was *the* most important, but this is characteristic of the usual tendency to "hype" of this Pied Piper of leadership seminars).

Alisa is a prodigy, (in the sense of "once a prodigy always a prodigy"). Her career began at the age of 13 with the Cleveland Symphony. Her name is very hot on the concert circuit at the present moment, and she exhibits several of the more unhappy attributes of her status: very conservative in dress (almost always red, highlighting a ruddy complexion and lips dripping with lipstick), very high competence, little imagination, bringing few discoveries or new ideas to the production of one of the paradigm concertos in the repertoire, combined with an overall level of personal and artistic inhibition that may be taken as the hallmark of all that is wrong with the museum art

that classical music has become, one of the reasons that symphony orchestras are going bankrupt everywhere.

I could not avoid the feeling that there was something decidedly frozen, even unreal in Alisa Weilerstein's rendition of this much beloved concerto. One might argue that it possessed quality, even high quality; yet without vitality. What one looked for and did not find was the aching sweetness one finds in the basic nostalgia of the concerto, a nostalgia that indicates the deep depression into which the composer had fallen after the Great War, the darkness of which may be discerned beneath the pastoral calm of its surface mood.

Alisa Weilerstein performed as if she were on display, something like a red flower, like a rose or rhododendron in a showcase, frayed rather than sad, exuding a kind of lifeless sorrow with none of the desperate energy one associates with true grief. These opinions are very subjective and may be dismissed as such, however I did listen to the performance very carefully, closing my eyes and concentrating on the music; this is what I came up with.

As is customary, Alisa Weilerstein was handed a bouquet of flowers (blood red of course). As a 'brave gesture against convention', she moved one of them and handed it to the concertmaster. Not the lead cellist, mind you, nor anyone else in the orchestra. It is so customary to direct *all*

the applause, hand-shakes and congratulations to the concertmaster, that one might interpret this seemingly bold gesture as a reinforcement of the stale conventions of classical performances, rather than any real attempt to shake loose from them. I've speculated more than once on how often concertmasters need to visit physical therapists, given all the mashing their right hands have to endure from the numerous public handshakes they receive at each and every concert!

In conclusion, my (necessarily superficial) opinion which I drew from a single concert, is that Alisa Weilerstein is very talented yet very conventional, technically skilled but somewhat lifeless. To begin the process of escaping from her greenhouse, she might begin by experimenting with colorations that minimize the ubiquity of red.

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Ein Heldenleben

I can have no quarrel with the performance by the BPYO of this monument to brilliant, imaginative orchestration. This Strauss tone poem appears to be a stock favorite of youth orchestras, but I very much doubt there are more than a handful of orchestras, both young and adult, that could pull off a performance as accomplished and professional as the one we heard on this occasion. Observe that, in contrast to my

opinions of *Till Eulenspiegel , Death and Transfiguration* and *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, I really don't like the piece.

Ben Zander himself gave us the explanation for this amazing performance in his speech at the reception later that night. He told us that the only way the BPYO could have pulled it off was through long hours of sectional rehearsals. Ein Heldenleben is afflicted with "sectionalism": the strings *mean* Hero/Strauss; the horns *mean* triumph; the winds *mean* nasty back-biting critics; the concertmaster's cadenzas *mean* Strauss's wife; the drums *mean* battle , etc….. It's actually something in the manner of a grotesque 'concerto grosso', with its divisions of *concerto, ripieno, soloisti ,tutti* and *ritornello*.

As Ben Zander reminded us, no professional symphony orchestra would have the patience or the money to schedule such long and tiring sectional rehearsals; the unions would start shouting from the rooftops long before the ordeal had gotten underway. Ein Heldenleben is already expensive enough, with over 60 string players, a violin virtuoso for concertmaster, almost impossibly difficult brass parts, 8 horns, 5 trumpets, 2 tubas, quadruple winds, an off-stage band, full percussion and even a wind machine, (which is what I suppose the harmonium was all about). Only a volunteer orchestra, *indeed only an orchestra of inspired and aspiring student musicians* , could accomplish such a prodigious feat.

To take one example, the virtuoso concertmaster, the 17-year old Hikaru Yonezaki, is now in her senior year at Newton South High School.

Almost all the vices of the performance were those of Richard Strauss; yet, there are so many of them that they inevitably spilled over into the performance itself. Which is more appalling? I ask myself: is it Richard Strauss' conception of The Hero, or Richard Strauss' conception of *himself* as The Hero?

One searches in vain for the dividing lines between heroism, heroics and histrionics; there is no way to disentangle them in this music; perhaps Richard Strauss did not intend them to be so. What is the benefit to be gained from breath-takingly brilliant orchestration, if the musical content contains so much material filled with bombast and/or sentimentality?

I am, of course, making the customary assumption that Strauss took his own interpretations of the story lines seriously. If one allows for the possibility that there is more than a little irony, even self-deprecation, in this self-portrait, then it (may be) possible to listen and enjoy the music without ascribing to the composer the emotional age of a 12-year old. I could go on in detail, but I have to truncate this article here because of the pressure of other projects.

One can read a commentary supporting my views about Ein Heldenleben, starting on page 140 of Matthew Boyden's comprehensive biography, "Richard Strauss", Northeastern University Press, 1999. One can then continue on to the chapters covering the period 1933-1945 to read, in some detail, of the shameful conduct of this "great hero" , during the Third Reich.