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French horn soloist impressive with VSO in Deer Lake setting

VANCOUVER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Outdoor concert
Deer Lake Park, July 23

BY DAVID GORDON DUKE

REVIEW | The VSO's annual Deer Lake concert sees the orchestra playing outdoors to its biggest audience of the season. By 7:15 p.m. on Sunday an audience of thousands had gathered on the large, gently sloping lawn in perfect high summer weather, anticipating a pleasant evening of classical music.

The orchestra accrues an enormous amount of goodwill through programs like Deer Lake. But a couple of hard, nagging questions need to be asked. Is the sound any good? Is the standard of playing representative of the concert hall?

Both get a qualified "yes."

Even large orchestras require amplifi-

cation without a proper shell — Burnaby's missing the boat by not getting an attractive permanent stage.

If Sunday's sound wasn't the same as at the Orpheum, it was more than satisfactory.

For the record, miking emphasized the bass and timpani, reduced the sweetness of the upper strings, and favoured individual winds. Pieces with relatively straightforward orchestrations, like Verdi's *Grand March* from *Aida*, sounded better than those with thick or tricky scoring.

VSO assistant conductor Ken Hsieh is an energetic, stylish maestro on the way up. The orchestra respects him, and plays well under his baton. The tasting menu of classical favourites didn't give players the necessary scope to really show their stuff, but discipline was con-

sistent and the solo winds, in particular, turned in solid work.

Perhaps the most impressive element of the program was young Jonathan Blackman, French horn soloist in the final movement of Mozart's K. 495 *Concerto* (the one with the Flanders and Swann words, if that helps) and the opening allegro from Richard Strauss's *First Concerto*.

But for sheer voluptuous sound, not to mention audience appeal, there's nothing like Tchaikovsky's shamelessly effective *1812 Overture*, used as the concert's grand finale.

Although we had to make do with recorded cannons and church bells, the orchestra provided the requisite pyrotechnics all on their own.

David Gordon Duke is a Vancouver author and educator.