

## BCO concert themes reflect era of its birth



Handout photo, October 17, 2007

**Mark Peskanov played his solo with strength.**

By Tim Smith | Sun Music Critic  
*October 18, 2007*

The Baltimore Chamber Orchestra opened its 25th anniversary season Tuesday night with the kind of imaginative programming that music director Markand Thakar has made a specialty. In between familiar Beethoven pieces were two rarities by African-born composers and a movie theme by John Williams - a neat balancing act.

Thakar's choices for this concert and the rest of the season were inspired by the ensemble's milestone. He looked back at 1984, when conductor Anne Harrigan and her intrepid colleagues launched the BCO, and took note of what was going on in the world. The result is a series of programs that reflect various aspects of the volatile '80s.

Taking the struggle against apartheid as a starting point, Thakar chose works by South African Stefans Grove and Nigerian Fela Sowande. Williams' theme from Schindler's List provided a reminder of other battles against oppression. Beethoven, of course, fit into the mix because he's such an exemplary champion of freedom.

Although the acoustically arid auditorium at Beth Tfiloh Synagogue hardly made an ideal place for an orchestra, enough of the music-making came across to make a positive impression. (Things were presumably more accommodating when the concert was repeated last night at Goucher College.)

The biggest item on the bill, Beethoven's Violin Concerto, registered with particular impact Tuesday. Russian-born Mark Peskanov gave a meaty account of the solo part.

He sometimes sacrificed tonal smoothness to make a strongly expressive point but always remained attentive to the architectural integrity of a phrase. There was a good deal of freshness in his approach, which put a little more emphasis on momentum and drama than violinists tend to do these days. Peskanov added welcome personal touches in the cadenzas - he wrote them himself. They were full of propulsion and bravura, yet not excessively so.

Thakar drew supple, mostly sturdy playing from the ensemble throughout the concerto.

The violinist also did tender solo work in the brief Schindler's List item in the first half of the concert, which opened with Thakar leading a crisp account of Beethoven's Creatures of Prometheus Overture.

Remarkable concision and shadowy harmonies characterize the Three Meditations for chamber orchestra by the octogenarian Grove, who taught at the Peabody Institute several decades ago. The second of these contemplative movements, with some wonderfully subtle percussion around the edges, achieved a particularly atmospheric effect. The BCO sensitively explored this rare, intriguing territory.

Sowande's African Suite for string orchestra is a 1930 work that makes charming, if somewhat uneventful, use of Nigerian folk tunes and, in the second movement, offers a lushly lyrical reverie. The performance could have been a bit tighter but caught the flavor of the score.

Copyright © 2007, [The Baltimore Sun](#)