

# Energized DSSO shows its versatility

**By Samuel Black For the News Tribune,  
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Saturday's performance by the Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra was equal to dining at three unique restaurants on the way to the DECC. A more varied program can hardly be imagined. And the DSSO, led by Maestro Markand Thakar, seemed energized by each of the wide-ranging compositions.

"The Chairman Dances" was premiered in January 1986, and American composer John Adams offered multiple challenges. He started with a small number of musical patterns, then repeated them endlessly, with subtle variations each time around. Listeners either drop away early or are hypnotized by the effect and surprised when the music stops. The orchestra, too, had to remain focused to keep the momentum, even as the notes seemed to go in circles. The multiple percussionists used sticks, mallets and cello bows to benumb the listener. The overall effect, however, was gripping, right to the final beat.

The Russian composer Aram Khachaturian survived in a radically different era. He kept several dictators happy, even as he tried to create original music based on tunes that inspired the hearts of real people. The Violin Concerto, written in 1940, was an exercise in perpetual motion for the soloist, and total delight for the audience.

For guest violinist Mark Peskanov, this work was still as refreshing as a North Shore stream. His effortless manner belied the complexity of the music. At times, our ears detected two players, only to realize that Peskanov was both at the same time. The sultry melodies of the slow movement were shared by the violin and bassoon, drawing the listener in to the flowing stream.

The dance-like finale rippled off the fingers of Peskanov as crisp as new snowflakes. His total control of this devilish movement brought the house to its feet. The muted warmth of his violin added a gentle range of colors to this flashy concerto.

Thakar steered the DSSO back into the mainstream of symphonic literature by offering the Symphony No. 7 by Antonin Dvorak, first performed in 1885. Once again, we heard the genuine versatility of the DSSO in filling the auditorium with the lush harmonies and Czech rhythms of this deeply Romantic composer.

The first movement splashed melodies from one side of the stage to the other as strings and woodwinds shared themes. The meandering clarinet brought the richness of the trees and hills from Dvorak's home to ours in the lyrical slow movement. The rest was relentless drive, but with considerable sparkle. Dvorak the storyteller unrolled a dramatic tale as a finale. As the brass took over the main themes, the orchestra seemed to expand beyond the limits of the stage as the mood shifted from minor to major. With a series of rich and festive explosions, Dvorak and Thakar closed the evening.

The ability of the DSSO to shift between generations of musical styles was a rare treat. Thanks are in order to all the players, and to Thakar for his creative programming.