

Review: Swiss visitor pumps up Abravanel crowd

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Keith Lockhart bows out as Utah Symphony music director after next season, so theoretically, any guest conductor on the Abravanel Hall podium in the meantime could be a candidate to replace him - though the orchestra board is guarding the list of hopefuls with utmost discretion.

Swiss conductor Thierry Fischer makes his case this weekend. Who knows whether he'd be interested in relocating from Europe, where he's spent his career so far - but his no-holds-barred reading of Berlioz's "Symphonie fantastique" left the audience shouting its approval and the orchestra giving hearty bow taps and foot stamps.

The opening movement, describing the reveries of the drug-addled protagonist, gave a hint of what was to come: Fischer built an increasingly feverish sound before unleashing a barrage of trumpets.

Principal oboist Robert Stephenson shone in his role as a shepherd in the third movement; a timpani trio, signaling an approaching storm, added foreboding atmosphere. The bassoon section, including new associate principal Leon Chodos, made a stunning impression in the grim fourth movement, subtitled "March to the Scaffold." The final movement, "Dream of a Witches' Sabbath," is often described as a trip through hell, and that's pretty much what Friday's audience got. Principal clarinetist Tad Calcara led the woodwinds in a deliciously grotesque performance. Cuban guitarist Manuel Barrueco is the guest soloist this weekend in Joaquín Rodrigo's "Concierto de Aranjuez." Barrueco's nimble technique and thoughtful musicality were shown to best effect in the concerto's slow movement, which featured not one but two hypnotic cadenzas. Holly Gornik's lovely English horn solos were the ideal complement.

The concert opened with Ravel's "Alborada del gracioso," which showed Fischer's technique to be just as his program bio promised: light, transparent and vividly characterized. Douglas Wolf's castanet work added the perfect dash of spice.

Utah Symphony

- * **WITH:** Guitarist Manuel Barrueco and conductor Thierry Fischer.
- * **WHERE:** Abravanel Hall, 123 W. South Temple, Salt Lake City.
- * **WHEN:** Friday; repeats tonight at 8.
- * **TICKETS:** \$12 to \$48 at 801-355-ARTS, the box office or www.artix.org.
- * **RUNNING TIME:** Two hours, including intermission.
- * **BOTTOM LINE:** Fasten your seatbelts for a wild ride through Berlioz's "Symphonie fantastique."