

# ALBANY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, 12/14/2007

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Cellos stand out in ASO's `Memories`

By JOSEPH DALTON Special to the Times Union

TROY, NY Cellos had the first and last word in the Albany Symphony Orchestra's program "Memories of the Old Country" on Friday night at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall. The cello section — only three players for this evening of reduced forces — introduced the bouncing lyric melody of Schubert's Symphony No. 8 in B minor, "Unfinished." Its two movements functioned like a double overture to start the night.

The evening's star was cellist Matt Haimovitz, who performed in concertos before and after intermission. Youngish, burly and pony-tailed, Haimovitz brought a simmering intensity to every note he played.

Haimovitz has built a reputation on taking classical music to unusual places and bringing fresh sounds into classical music. With that in mind, music director David Alan Miller had the inspired idea of asking composer Stephen Dankner, lately of Williamstown, Mass., to create a concerto for Haimovitz and the ASO using the style of klezmer, the celebratory Jewish folk music.

Dankner's new work, "Out of Endless Yearnings: A Klezmer Fantasy for Cello and Orchestra" is the most colorful and immediately appealing ASO commission in years. Dances ricochet through the piece with glee and the orchestration was crisp and idiomatic, as was the playing. The nearly hyperactive pacing and sometimes sassy exchange of melodic ideas brought to mind cartoon music. The composer did say in his prefatory remarks, "Feel free to laugh or smile at least." Indeed, it was hard not to.

The cello may be rather low on the list of instruments associated with klezmer, but it never felt like an intruder or a thief. Dankner gave the instrument plenty of juicy material, and Haimovitz brought out the delicate balance between joy and tears.