

CLASSIFIEDS ON THE BACK

LIVING AT HOME

A guide to your space — indoors and out

CONCERT REVIEW

Dichter performs with ease

ANNA REGUERO
STAFF MUSIC CRITIC

Three years after a last-option surgery for a debilitating hand disease affecting his right hand, pianist Misha Dichter has never sounded more secure. He performed Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* at the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra's concert Thursday night, which repeats tonight, with undeniable ease.

Anyone familiar with the piece knows there's nothing easy about it.

The work consists of 24 challenging variations, each with powerful, wide-spanning chords, impressionistic rolls across the keyboard and other bouts of virtuosity.

None of the work's demands seemed to cause Dichter to break a sweat.

As precisely and rapidly as Dichter's fingers traversed the piano, he would have difficulty convincing someone that just years ago his right hand was unusable and his career in question.

This was the first time Rochester audiences had heard Dichter since his 2006 decline and following surgery, and I'm doubtful that any long-time fans in the packed audience would have been able to tell any difference.

In a recent interview, Dichter, the silver medalist at the 1966 Tchaikovsky Competition, says he's playing better than ever.

Such ease, however, resulted in a slightly cool performance.

Even in the 18th variation, which inverts the main theme into a passionate serenade (one that audiences would surely recognize), Dichter didn't bask in Rachmaninoff's romanticism. He kept it moving along, sitting back and enjoying the ride, as if he were reliably on autopilot.

Christopher Seaman, who was conducting, gave Dichter a big high-five after the performance, the kind you might see from baseball team members after a home run.

The RPO always does well with the swashbuckling, blockbuster-type scores it performed on the rest of the program: Corigliano's *Gazebo Dances*, an energetic work with a country carnival atmosphere, and Elgar's *In the South*, a fanciful, noble piece that reminds me of Strauss' action-packed tone poems.

The brass section performed valiantly, and in a more wistful section of the Elgar, principal violist Melissa Matson emerged with a thoughtful solo.

Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony* came after intermission, but the work's transparency diverged from the rest of the program. Clarinetist Kenneth Grant provided a rounded cover to oboist Erik Behr's tightly centered tone in a unison duet in the work's first movement, and both musicians kept shapely lines in their second movement solos. □

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If you go

What: Misha Dichter performs with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra.

Where: Eastman Theatre, 60 Gibbs St.

When: 8 tonight.

Cost: \$20 to \$75.

For more: (585) 454-2100 or go to www.rpo.org.

FROM THE ZOO



Spring break full of movies, exhibits, festivals and more

CATHERINE ROBERTS
LEAD LOCAL EDITOR/LIFE

Spend some time with the animals while the kids are out of school — or go to a museum, library or YMCA for a week of fun activities.

The **Seneca Park Zoo** is open all week with new polar bear Zero often showing off and a big playground to work off some energy. The zoo kicks off spring break this weekend with an Earth Day event today celebrating endangered animals and conservation. On Sunday, it holds a recycling rally. Call (585) 336-7200 or go to senecaparkzoo.org.

Springdale Farm in Northampton Park in Ogden is open all week, with nature trails, a petting zoo and a robotic milking operation that visitors can observe. From 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. next Saturday, the farm holds its annual **Sheep Shearing Festival** with free haircuts for kids, weaving and dying wool

For more things to do, click on our calendar at **DemocratandChronicle.com**.

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TO ZOOS



JEN RYNDA staff photographer

A trip to the Seneca Park Zoo will fill your day with play, as Abby Martineck, 3, of Rochester, above, finds out at the zoo's playground. And don't forget to say "hello" to Puff the sea lion. If zoos aren't in your DNA, then maybe the Zoob play zone, center photo, at Strong National Museum of Play will keep kids occupied building everything from molecular models to cars.

THEATER REVIEW

'Wicked' dazzles audience

STUART LOW
STAFF WRITER

First-rate performances and dazzling sets turned the formulaic enchantments of *Wicked* into something like magic.

Stephen Schwartz's hit musical cooks up a witch's brewhaha of feminine rivalry and friendship. Created as a prequel to *The Wizard of Oz*, it portrays the future Wicked Witch of the West (Elphaba) and Good Witch of the North (Glinda) as testy college classmates.

At Thursday's rapturously received production at the Auditorium Theatre, Donna Vivino made every other Emerald City character green with envy. She sang much of the first act with an intense, soft-edged alto and built up to a defiant powerhouse delivery worthy of Barbra Streisand.

Her acting was equally colorful — not easy when you're wearing green makeup and flying to the rafters on a broomstick.

If you go

What: *Wicked*.
When: Through May 2, with performances at 2 and 8 p.m. today and 1 and 6:30 p.m. Sunday.

Where: Auditorium Theatre, 885 E. Main St.

Tickets: \$39.50 to \$132.50; available at the box office and through Ticketmaster, (800) 745-3000 or www.ticketmaster.com.

She paced herself intelligently throughout the three-hour show — the result of a life spent onstage. (She started at age 8 by playing Cosette in the original Broadway cast of *Les Miserables*.)

Richard Blake fully matched her ardor as Fiyero, the beefcake

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JOAN MARCUS
Donna Vivino delivers a powerhouse performance as Elphaba.

