

A chance to see a true musical prodigy

May 31, 2011, 01:53 AM

I wonder how many, as I, wished they had been able to hear such as Yehudi Menuhin, Itzhak Perlman or Jascha Heifetz when they were young prodigies to be able to say, I heard "so and so way back when...?"

Well, the opportunity is now to experience another upcoming world-class violinist, one of Silicon Valley and South Bay's own, the 14-year-old Stephen Waarts of Los Altos.

It's an understatement to label him as only a prodigy because he has already performed some of the most difficult and famous of the adult concerti with a number of Bay Area symphony orchestras and is preparing to perform what may be the most difficult of all, the "Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco Concerto," in Los Angeles in August. Also, he has won numerous first places in competitions, nationally and internationally and performed abroad in Norway, Moscow and Weimar, Germany.



I first heard Stephen, when he was only 8 and playing a three-quarter size instrument, at the request of his, then, teacher Jenny Rudin. He simply knocked me off of the stool, not just by his advanced technique, which I had experienced a number of times in my reviewing of the wonderful youth orchestras and soloists in this area, but by his unexpectedly advanced and mature interpretations for an 8-year-old and the emotion-evoking quality of his sound. He is one of only a few world-class violinists who can bring me to tears with that rare beauty.

He has been developing outside of the parameters of the other young symphony soloists in the Bay Area, who conventionally compete for solo spots with their own orchestras, but has won first place honors in every other local competition he entered. But, it wasn't until — at age 11 — when he won a competition for string players up to the age of 24 sponsored by the Diablo Symphony and then knocked the socks of that audience with a Wieniawski concerto, I became convinced this one was destined to become one of the world's greatest.

And, he hasn't caused me to doubt that prediction, ever. All of his accomplishments are too extensive for me to list here but summarizing: Performances of 11 complete famous concerti by Beethoven, Brahms Elgar, Tchaikovsky, Wieniawski, Paganini, Mozart, Saint-Saens and Mendelssohn, with 17 different symphonic and string orchestras, some for multiple times.

Most memorable for me is when he performed at Carnegie Hall among 22 others youngsters who won first places in a number of different musical art forms and outclassed all of them, which led to an invitation to represent the United States at an international music festival for young musicians in Moscow. From among over a thousand young musicians from around the world, he was chosen to perform at the Grand Closing Concert at the Moscow University.

But, his crowning competitive achievements may have been, at age 13, a second place win at, perhaps, the most prestigious string competitions of all, the Yehudi Menuhin International Competition for Young Violinists in Oslo, Norway (where international music critics hinted he should have won first place), followed by a first place win at the Louis Spohr competition in Weimar, Germany where he was, also, given a special award for the best interpretation of a romantic concerto by all of the competitors.

Recently, he has come to the attention of, whom I consider the greatest of the world's violinists, Itzhak Perlman, and was invited for special private lessons. And in fall, he will enroll as a scholarship student at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where his teacher will be the famed concert violinist Aaron Rosand.

The Silicon Valley Symphony is one of the best of the Bay Area's orchestral ensembles, directed by its founder, Michael Gibson.

The rest of the program includes Rossini's "L'italiana in Algeri Overture," Vaughan Williams' "Fantasy on a Theme by Thomas Tallis" and Prokofiev's "Classical Symphony."

Stephen will be performing, arguably, the most popular of the great concerti, the surpassingly beautiful "Mendelssohn Concerto," which will put little demand upon his extraordinary technique but will be a prime vehicle for your experiencing the maturity of his musical expression and the beauty of his sound.