

DVD REVIEW

Portrait of a passionate, sometimes awestruck 'Andris Nelsons'

By David Weininger | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT OCTOBER 10, 2013

ANDRIS NELSONS: GENIUS ON FIRE

Documentary

(Orfeo)

Once you get past the gaudy title and some overheated prose — “His vitality, creativity, and daring embrace of the deepest emotions electrified both musicians and audiences alike” — this documentary turns out to be an enjoyable portrait of the man who will be the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s music director, starting in the fall of 2014. (Next week he will be in town to conduct the BSO’s Oct. 17-19 concert series.) Director Astrid Bscher spent two years following Andris Nelsons around the world: Segments of the film were shot in New York, Essen, Bayreuth, Cologne, and his hometown, Riga, Latvia.



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On the podium, Nelsons sports a wide grin and awestruck expression that reinforce just how complete his identification with music is. But he’s alone for most of the travels and often seems nostalgic for a home that barely existed during this busy period. (That may be one reason why the few domestic scenes with his girlfriend-then-wife, soprano Kristine Opolais, seem rather artificial.)

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There are a few things to be learned about Nelsons from the documentary — that he studied taekwondo as a child, for one. It’s a shock to discover that he hates to fly, given his international commitments. You see him sweat through a shirt during rehearsal. The

most insightful point the film makes is that Nelsons' openhearted, almost naive personality endears him to musicians, not always the warmest bunch.

“Some conductors economize in rehearsal,” says a violinist. “They just explain things and then explode emotionally in the concert. But here, as you can see, it’s different. The way it is in rehearsal is the way it is during the concert, just doubly so.”

The most charming moment was filmed just after Nelsons and Opolais spontaneously got married in 2011 (on the same day as Prince William and Kate Middleton). Nelsons is about to start a rehearsal of Puccini’s “Suor Angelica” with Opolais in the cast. Instead of beginning the opera, the WDR Symphony Orchestra bursts into Mendelssohn’s wedding march. Nelsons looks bewildered and asks whether someone has gotten married. He has to be told that this is, in fact, a salute to him and his new bride.

For those watching the film for clues about Nelsons’ future with the BSO, perhaps the most perceptive statement comes from pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim. “Sometimes he’s a bit too humble,” Barenboim says with a smile, “but that will pass.”

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