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## Andrew Pincus: Anything but an ordinary summer at Tanglewood


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Stephanie Blythe and Thomas Mayer and Andris Nelsons during the Boston Symphony Orchestra's performance of Wagner's complete "Das Rheingold."

**Stephanie Blythe and Thomas Mayer and Andris Nelsons during the Boston Symphony Orchestra's performance of Wagner's complete "Das Rheingold."**  
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By Andrew L. Pincus, Special to The Eagle

LENOX — Anybody who thought Tanglewood was the same old this summer wasn't paying attention.

A summer that included a four-day series of bird walks, talks and concerts in collaboration with Mass Audubon can't be accounted the same old. Nor can a six-concert survey of Schubert's lieder and chamber music. Nor a groundbreaking for a \$40 million new concert and learning complex, or a powerful Beethoven Ninth, or a tremendous semi-staging of Wagner's complete "Das Rheingold" with a first-rate cast, both works conducted by Andris Nelsons.

There were disappointments, of course; there always will be. But one striking feature of the season was how it divided into Nelsons and non-Nelsons halves. When the Boston Symphony Orchestra music director was in charge during the first and last two weeks of the eight-week season, the level of energy and excitement distinctly shot up. The middle four weeks, though generally successful, had their ups and downs.

It was that way under previous music directors, too, but in his third Tanglewood season as chief, Nelsons went an extra mile, conducting two Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra concerts, sharing the podium with John Williams in Williams' Film Night, and putting himself out there as a trumpeter alongside TMC students and BSO members.

One clear result with both orchestras was a high level of performance, which carried over into programs conducted by guests. BSO musicians love to give their best for this man, and it sh

The downside in all this was the public's unwillingness to take chances on some of the more unusual or adventurous programs the BSO devised. Tanglewood on Parade, Film Night, Yo-Yo Ma, the closing day's Beethoven Ninth: You can fill the place to bursting with these sure-fire blockbusters. Other events, such as William Walton's flagrantly theatrical "Belshazzar's Feast," went begging for bodies in seats.

Even the opera gala, with Nelsons leading the BSO and three certified stars of the opera world — Kristine Opolais, Russell Thomas and Bryn Terfel — had to be papered to avoid embarrassing rows of empty Shed seats. On several weekends, the call went out through cultural and other organizations: Come get your freebies. Short attention spans were also conspicuous as digital screens regularly stayed lit till the last possible moment before a performance and lit up again the moment it was over.

Other memorable events come to mind: Thomas Ad's contributions as composer, conductor, pianist and teacher in his first summer as the BSO's "artistic partner"; pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard spinning enchantment in Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand, and 27-year-old Israeli conductor Lahav Shani's astonishing debut. (Can he keep it up?) Pianists Emanuel Ax and Garrick Ohlsson continued their runs of outstanding performances, Ohlsson now as the summer's Koussevitzky Artist.

New programs for kids — they're the audience of the future — were added, and three recent TMC graduates served as co-curators of the school's Festival of Contemporary Music, bringing in a fresh corps of younger composers along with modern masters. Like 'em or not, the brash or exploratory new pieces are where music is going. The revival of Henri Dutilleux's "The Shadows of Time," a BSO commission, was a highlight.

The "Rheingold" staging, apparently worked out by the singers themselves, had a startling realism as well as mythical quality despite the lack of scenery. The opera night had neither despite Opolais and Terfel as star attractions.

Two other stagings misfired. Both the BSO's enacted version of Mendelssohn's "Midsummer Night's Dream" music, and the Emerson String Quartet's attempt to re-create Shostakovich's troubles under Stalin, lapsed into confusion. In both, the music became an incidental backdrop to impenetrable narratives.

Give the BSO credit: Year after year, it maintains the integrity of the central eight-week classical season, even as popular events proliferate at both ends. Tanglewood is, after all, the summer home of a major symphony orchestra and its influential academy, not a performing arts center like Saratoga. This costs money — lots of it — and the BSO seems to have no difficulty in coming up with an extra \$40 million for a new facility, which is also planned to be available for community events during the off season.

The old lady of West Street has come a long way from her beginnings with three concerts on each of two weekends in 1937. Next summer will bring wall-to-wall Leonard Bernstein in celebration of his centenary. Get ready to mambo.

