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MUSIC REVIEW

McGegan's 'Grand Tour' goes Gallic

By Michael Rydzyński

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THE irrepressible conductor Nicholas McGegan, acting as tour guide, made a pleasant program of French music even more so at the Hollywood Bowl on Tuesday evening with his ebullient personality, infectious enthusiasm and dry British wit.

All those qualities came through in spades, including his sprightly runs onto and off the stage and his entertaining introductions to his at-times over-the-top conducting. Sans baton, McGegan cajoled, ambled, even danced on the podium, showing off the music to his audience, whom he encouraged to applaud not only after but also during any movement. At least there were no sing-along opportunities.

Leading the Los Angeles Philharmonic in "The Grand Tour: Paris," the third of his four "Grand Tour" concerts at the Bowl, McGegan milked much humor from Haydn's Symphony No. 85 in B flat (1786), known as "La reine" (The Queen) because Marie Antoinette liked it. Likable it was in McGegan's expressive, even mirthful hands: He flicked his finger toward the violins before the final chord as if to say, "Oh, one more for good luck." Although the woodwinds were occasionally overmatched by the strings, the balance on the whole was even, and principal oboist Ariana Ghez turned in exemplary solos in the first movement.

The balance in Mozart's "Paris" Symphony, No. 31 in D, K. 297 (1778), was even more successfully achieved. The orchestra, at reduced forces all night, performed by turns vibrantly, elegantly, forcefully and stylishly, with the second movement especially delicate yet delightfully sly.

Jean-Baptiste Davaux's 1794 double-violin concerto, the *Symphonie Concertante on French Revolutionary Airs*, spotlighted two members of the Philharmonic. Elizabeth Baker brought such austere, regal bearing to the work that she appeared distanced from all, including solo partner and co-principal second violinist Kristine Hedwall, who at least looked over to Baker now and again. Despite this seeming lack of interplay, they matched their tone precisely.

The concert opened with a boisterous account of the battle-like Overture to Jean-Philippe Rameau's 1749 opera, "Naïs." Added was a wind machine that had the final, amusing word.

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