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Flying Karamazov Brothers a soaring success at Spangenberg

By John Orr
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It was an inspired and delightful joining: The zany, brilliant, hilarious and astounding Flying Karamazov Brothers, and the California Pops Orchestra, which has been known to hit some zany, brilliant and hilarious notes of its own.

A chance to see The Flying Karamazov Brothers should never be missed, as was proven Saturday at Spangenberg Theater in Palo Alto.

Brothers Dimitri (Paul Magid), Alexei (Mark Ettinger) and Zossima (Stephen Bent) entered from the wings in super slow motion, looks of panicked flight on their faces (time to start the show!), while the orchestra played Edvard Grieg's "Hall of the Mountain King."

Meanwhile, a fourth brother, Pavel (Roderick Kimball) — who looks remarkably like Stan Laurel of Laurel and Hardy fame, except, perhaps, a bit goofier — entered blithely at normal speed, ignoring the great comedic drama of his brothers' entrances. Oops! Forgot something! Off stage he went! Then back again!

Before long the Brothers all hit full speed in a show that included ballet dancing that was funnier than it was graceful (Karen Gabay's place in the dance pantheon remains unchallenged), lots of fabulous club-juggling, fan juggling and, of course, "taiko" drumming. Except The Flying Karamazov Brothers don't bother with fancy drums from Japan, when cardboard boxes work just as well — and are a lot funnier. My 7-year-old nearly fell out of his seat laughing as the Brothers pounded viciously on the boxes till they were shredded, with one brother walking off stage with his head stuck in a box.

The zaniness level dropped just a little when Alexei took the baton from Pops conductor Kim Venaas to direct Zossima, on euphonium, and the orchestra on Mozart's Bassoon Concerto. It was lovely, except for the big "BLAT!" into Alexei's face at one point.

There were troubles with wireless microphones. Occasionally a loud, rude noise would be heard from the speakers, which the Brothers gestured away by waving their hands behind their tushes with an "Excuse me."

The worst part was when it was over and we all had to leave.

Great show, a wonderful ending to the Pop's season, and here's hoping the Brothers come back to perform with the Pops again soon.

Delightful.