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NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND THE FLYING KARAMAZOV BROTHERS

By Mark Carrington

Last night at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall, the Flying Karamazov Brothers charted the intersection of the twin worlds of music and juggling with a blend of artistry that was part genius, part insanity.

While it was billed as a National Symphony Orchestra pops concert, there can be little doubt as to who the stars were. The Brothers are irrepressibly good at what they do and infectiously funny to boot.

From their slow-motion entrance to Grieg's "Hall of the Mountain King" to their riotous rendition of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" (the quartet belted out the tune with juggling pins on their heads while the NSO sang along), one never quite knew what to expect next.

Certainly choreographer George Balanchine could never have anticipated men in tutus and pink stockings hamming Rossini's "William Tell" quite this way. Japanese festival drumming, too, will never again be the same after one of the Brothers beat the living daylights out of his meticulously tuned cardboard box.

Behind the high jinks was some of the finest juggling imaginable. The Brothers' humor didn't overshadow their craft, it augmented it in breathtaking fashion -- as when two of the troupe succeeded in juggling marimba sticks while playing first "Chopsticks" and then, amazingly, a Bach two-part invention. Successful entertainment acts were ever thus: Draw the audience in, then blow them away.

In a realm where Mozart, Monty Python and jugglers coexist in a state of manic glee, the Flying Karamazov Brothers are peerless.