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MUSIC REVIEW; Attending to the Needs Of the Musical Food Chain

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There are all sorts of reasons that the New York Youth Symphony is a worthy project, and if some are purely educational -- for 40 seasons it has offered talented musicians from 12 to 22 a place to learn orchestral playing -- others have to do with its place in the larger music scene.

Its performances, for one thing, are surprisingly good, given its student-ensemble status. Also, the orchestra has made a point of commissioning new works from young composers, a practice that touches on every part of the musical food chain: the composers get paying jobs, the musicians put together works they can't hear on recordings, and listeners get an early glimpse of a composer whom they may hear from again.

At the orchestra's Carnegie Hall concert on Sunday afternoon, the new work was "Torn Threads Rewoven" by Matthew Tommasini, a doctoral student of Bright Sheng at the University of Michigan. Mr. Tommasini's piece, inspired by a visit to ground zero, is thoughtfully organized but also openly emotional. It is not without clichés, but they are comparatively few. More telling is Mr. Tommasini's approach to quickly shifting orchestral coloration, which the players responded to with an appropriate suppleness.

The performance was conducted by Paul Haas, who became music director earlier this season. He uses clear, precise gestures, and he draws polished, energetic performances. The orchestra's sound is not one size fits all. In the Barber Violin Concerto, which filled out the first half of the program, the orchestra matched and amplified the lush, shapely sound that Giora Schmidt brought to the solo line. The other big work on the program, the Sibelius Second Symphony, demanded something very different -- wintry heft and a large measure of melancholy -- and Mr. Haas and his players created that work effectively and affectingly.