
CONCERT REVIEW

Oregon Mozart Players open with élan

By Terry McQuilkin

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Is there a better way for the Oregon Mozart Players to begin its concert season (given that this is still Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's bicentenary) than with an all-Mozart program?

Here's how: Begin with an all-Mozart program featuring two world-class soloists delivering a sterling performance of the Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat, K. 364.

That is exactly what the enthusiastic opening-night audience enjoyed Saturday evening at the Hult, as two New Yorkers - violinist Glenn Dicterow and violist Karen Dreyfus - brought style and eloquence to the solo lines of the Sinfonia.

Dicterow is concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic and teaches at the Manhattan School of Music and at the Juilliard School. Dreyfus is a soloist and chamber musician who also teaches at Manhattan and Juilliard.

Dicterow's flawless and seemingly effortless delivery complemented the clear and radiant tone he evoked from his 1721 Guarneri. Dreyfus, with equal finesse, produced a sound that was rich, warm and vibrant, providing the perfect degree of timbral contrast as the two engaged in a kind of extended musical dialogue throughout.

Particularly memorable were the cadenzas in the first and second movements: Each soloist's virtuosity was very much in evidence, yet these cadenzas were not mere showcases of technical prowess. Individually, each shaped lines persuasively; when playing together the duo, in addition to demonstrating faultless synchronicity, highlighted the cleverness of the counterpoint.

Under conductor Glenn Cortese's leadership, the Mozart Players provided first-rate support.

To the tutti sections, the ensemble brought surefire accuracy, brio and a fine sense of dramatic flow. Like every mature Mozart piece, the Sinfonia (even with its modest instrumentation) is scored masterfully; Cortese presided over wonderfully transparent reading.

There were a few moments when I had a bit of difficulty hearing the soloists clearly from my seat near the front of the balcony. I suspect that it had more to do with the acoustics of the hall than with orchestral overzealousness.

The concert opened with the Divertimento in D, K. 205, for violin, viola, cello, double bass (the string parts were played by the full section), bassoon and two horns, a piece dating from Mozart's 18th year. The conductor made brief, relevant comments before each piece, and he referred to the Divertimento as an example of 18th century Muzak - albeit skillfully written Muzak.

True, any background music composed by Mozart is bound to be a dozen times more engaging than concert music composed by almost any of his contemporaries, but I would have preferred a more substantial work. Still, it's impossible not to enjoy its sunny ebullience and the precision with which the Mozart Players delivered it.

Following a slow introduction, the piece moves into a blithesome Allegro, expertly dispatched with drive and vim. Two minuets - one rather stylized, one more rustic - framed the charming and lyrical middle movement, in which the orchestra's elegant playing was marred only by temporary intonation trouble.

The spirited last movement fairly bubbled over with energy. Like the second of the two minuets, it afforded an opportunity for horn players Lydia Van Dreel and David Kruse to demonstrate their polish and panache.

Following intermission came another 1773 composition, this time the delightful Symphony No. 29 in A, K. 201. In contrast to the Divertimento, this is a concert hall piece, and while it antedates the composer's mature period, it is certainly a work of striking power and dramatic shape.

The ensemble infused the opening movement with dynamism and unyielding momentum, and brought refined lyricism, grace and poignancy to the slow movement that followed. Cortese and company highlighted the wonderful contrasts found in the minuet, and the Molto Allegro buzzed along with élan. A high level of accuracy, transparency of line and balance among sections characterized this reading, aside from some occasional brashness from the horns.

The program was repeated Sunday afternoon in Beall Concert Hall at the University of Oregon.

Terry McQuilkin, an adjunct instructor of composition at the University of Oregon, reviews classical music for The Register-Guard.

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