

CONCERT REVIEW

Program just too eclectic to work as a whole

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The Oregon Mozart Players' final concert of the season was Saturday in the Soren Theatre, with a repeat matinee Sunday in Beall Hall.

We were offered an unusual assortment of pieces which, although tenuously related by theme to the sobriquet "Heroes and Legends," nevertheless did not form an integrated concert.

Richard Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll" came first. A dreamy, elegiac and beautiful piece, it was written as a birthday present to his wife, Cosima, and in gratitude to her for giving birth to their first legitimate child, Siegfried (Cosima had borne Wagner two previous children while she was still married to conductor Hans von Bulow!).

The piece is evidently a favorite; I reviewed it in February 1999, and the chamber orchestra has played it at least one other time. The first and second violins introduced the principal beatific melody, soon joined by the violas and cellos. There followed a breathtakingly serene entrance by Jill Paul's flute, followed by Cheryl Denice on oboe, Sarah Turley's beautiful toned clarinet, Elizabeth Shoemaker's bassoon and David Kruse's and Brad Kunchner's French horns. The quavering trills of the violins reminded me of reeds rustling in a breeze over a still pond. Some breathtaking pauses led into the thrilling climax, led by the horns and Dave Keckes-Chartrey's trumpet. The piece ended as peacefully and elegantly as it had begun - beautiful music played with polish and affection, with special performances by the woodwinds and brass.

Glen Cortese, the group's artistic director and conductor, next led the world premiere of his own composition, "Game Called.

Reflecting Cortese's love of music and baseball, and his wish to conjoin them, it contained some interesting and complex orchestration, much of which was

dominated by a variety of percussion instruments - cymbals, gongs, xylophone, piano and harp, with support from the timpani. There were musical cadences, sequences and nuances that reminded me quite strongly of Aaron Copland's music, as well as, perhaps, echoes of Roman amphitheater film music. It struck me as rather a sad piece despite the declamatory brass and timpani contributions.

Eugene Emeralds Assistant Manager, Bryan Beban provided clear and well-enunciated narration of Grantland Rice's short poem "Game Called," which inspired Cortese to compose this unusual 20-minute work.

After intermission, we heard Benjamin Britten's "The Sword in the Stone," a suite scored for flute, clarinet, oboe, trumpet, trombone, harp and percussion. Based on incidental music written for a BBC radio drama in the 1930s, it was, as Cortese remarked, "quirky and humorous - you may laugh if you feel like it."

While well played, (Jill Paul's flute was ethereal in the first movement), it struck me as being not of the high caliber of the rest of the program. It was background music to a radio drama, nothing more. It added little to the concert as a whole. The evening ended with a rousing performance of one of F.J. Haydn's "middle" symphonies, No. 63, so-called "La Roxelane." The first movement, Allegro, was standard Haydn fare, a marchlike initial theme with an interesting development. The second movement, "La Roxelane," Allegretto, was definitely a "feminine" affair. Coquettish, charming and with a sense of mystery, the orchestra gave its best playing of the evening here and in the final two movements.

The Menuet featured a lovely duet by the oboe and bassoon. The Finale was particularly noteworthy for its interesting progressions, key changes and exploration of unusual sequences. I was reminded a little of the development section of the first movement of W.A. Mozart's great G Minor Symphony, No. 40. Forward thinking music for its time, to be sure.

Overall, a bit of a mixed bag. The standard of play was quite good, with some outstanding individual contributions. But this was an eclectic musical selection. Sometimes eclecticism works; I'm not sure it did on Saturday evening.

John Farnworth of Vida reviews classical music for The Register-Guard.