

## **Albany Symphony Orchestra @ Troy Music Hall 3/26/10**

By JOSEPH DALTON  
Special to the Times Union

TROY – Music director David Alan Miller and the Albany Symphony Orchestra have made a virtue out of performing lots of new little works by emerging composers. Eager for the opportunity, the youngsters gladly take the modest commissions and write under tight deadlines. The results are usually diverting and forgettable.

A substantial new three-year grant from the Mellon Foundation has allowed the ASO to start bringing in some heavier guns. Next year John Corigliano will be on hand twice and this past week John Harbison was in town for the first of two springtime visits.

In Friday night's program at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, titled "John Harbison & Friends," the 71-year old composer's Symphony No. 4 stood tall alongside works of Copland and Haydn. Cast in five movements and lasting about half an hour, it was substantial, rich and assured.

Though prone to thick and dark orchestral textures, Harbison also has a keen dramatic flair. A heavy sound dominated the opening movement and yet its constant rhythmic pulse skipped around like a child in a meadow. A similar contrast came in the intermezzo, which alternated between gliding strings and light percussion.

The symphony elicited a fine performance especially from the expanded string choir, which was both supple and meaty. The work is being recorded for release with Harbison's "Great Gatsby" Suite, coming up in May.

Twenty-five year old composer Timothy Andres introduced his new piece "Look Around You" as a "double concerto but for only one player." Soloist Owen Dalby performed on both violin and viola, though somehow there didn't seem to be that much difference in sound or character between the two instruments. For long stretches Andres had the orchestra simply sustain chords. Except for a few exposed figures for violin that brought to mind a country fiddle, the solo writing was busy yet indistinct, something like treading water.

Let it not be said that young composers should be written off. Copland was 25 when he wrote "Music for the Theatre," the charming masterwork that opened the program. The woodwinds and brass delivered with appropriate sass, though there were occasional smudges of the larger ensemble in the trickier rhythmic passages.

Haydn's Symphony No. 82 "The Bear" arrived at the evening's conclusion like a cool fresh breeze. During the gently shifting currents of the Allegretto, Harbison's more forceful play with textures and accents came to mind.

Joseph Dalton is a local freelance writer who contributes regularly to the Times Union.

### **MUSIC REVIEW**

Albany Symphony Orchestra presents

"John Harbison & Friends"

When: 8 p.m. Friday

Where: Troy Savings Bank Music Hall

Duration: Two hours, 15 minutes with one intermission