

Albany Symphony Orchestra @ Troy Music Hall 10/10/09

By JOSEPH DALTON
Special to the Times Union

TROY – A quartet of highly diverse works adhered into a satisfying and well performed program for the Albany Symphony Orchestra's season opener at the Troy Savings Bank Music on Saturday night.

Sibelius' Seventh Symphony capped the evening and also, in a sense, cleared the slate. The preceding pieces were each in their own ways busy and detailed. But the one-movement symphony had a different metabolism, with a pacing that was broad and meditative. Lush textures dominated by the string choir were occasionally interrupted by slightly bitter passages from the winds. The final climax came from the brass, rising up like a sunrise. Its radiant coda had the strings suspended in high register.

The atmospheric writing actually recalled the opening piece, "These Worlds In Us," by 28 year-old Missy Mazzoli. The seven-minute tone poem cast a spell from its opening notes, played by two wheezy mouth organs. From there on, it was mostly a showcase of skillful orchestration. Either there were too many ideas spread all around or not enough good ones spotlighted. But Mazzoli succeed in creating an over all effect of clouds and confusion. It was dedicated to the composer's father, a Vietnam veteran.

Guest artist Garrick Ohlsson performed in piano concertos before and after intermission. Apart from his playing, he was a sight to see, standing a good foot taller than conductor David Alan Miller and even making the Steinway grand seem a bit puny.

Ohlsson's enormous hands made light work of the towering, dissonant chords in Martinu's Piano Concerto No. 4. Dating from 1957, the piece has the same block structures and garish colors of the mid-century fashions and furnishing that are currently in back in vogue.

The ASO also delivered the piece handily. It was demanding writing for sure, but more recent composers have given this orchestra tougher challenges.

Returning for Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 14, Ohlsson lightened his touch but still maintained a meaty sound, at least by Mozart standards. There's little of the usual back and forth dialogue in this concerto. The piano just plows along in an almost unbroken monologue while the orchestra floats above. Though Ohlsson seemed in his own world, Miller kept everything together. The slow movement reached toward the sublime.

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

MUSIC REVIEW

Albany Symphony Orchestra with guest artist Garrick Ohlsson

When: 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Troy Savings Bank Music Hall

Duration: Two hours with one intermission