

## CONCERT REVIEW

# 'Love and Marriage' show is exhilarating

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The theme of Saturday's Oregon Mozart Players concert at the Hult Center was "Love and Marriage." The program included Joaquin Rodrigo's Four Madrigals of Love, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor and Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 8.

The ensemble's music director, Glen Cortese, spoke to the audience before each work was performed, informing us of the program's relationship to the evening's theme.

Stylistically speaking, Mozart's work is regarded as the first Romantic piano concerto. Beethoven's Symphony No. 8 is perhaps the most upbeat of the composer's later symphonies, although it was composed while he was experiencing a failed affair and a falling out with his younger brother, who, according to Beethoven, had married a woman too low in status.

Rodrigo's Four Madrigals of Love consists of a musical setting of anonymous 16th century poetry. Originally, a singer and vihuela (a plucked stringed instrument that flourished in Spain from the 15th century to the 17th century) would have performed these poems. The Mozart Players performance of Rodrigo's adaptation was simply beautiful. The orchestration was quite colorful, including rich unison chords in the strings and frequent woodwind interjections.

The soloist, Eugene soprano Laura Decher Wayte, was vocally expressive. Her articulations of the text and sensitivity to the ensemble made for a tender performance. Her physical gestures, however, added little to the singing of such a passionate text. I expected Wayte to be equally expressive with her body as she was with her voice.

The third madrigal, "De donde venis, amore?" ("Where have you been, my love?"), was playful and humorous. Audience members laughed out loud several times. The madrigals included frequent word painting. During the fourth, "De los alamos vengo, madre" ("I come from the poplars, mother"), Wayte's "ha-ha" was imitated by the woodwinds. Percussionist Sean Wagoner's triangle note on the closing cadence savored the work's theme of love. The added vibrato effect, achieved by gently shaking the triangle after striking it, ended the madrigal with a kiss.

Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 was premiered with the composer at the keyboard in 1785, in Vienna. As the program notes informed us, "It is a brooding and stormy work ..."

The concerto opened with mysterious, driving syncopations in the violins and violas. The work then burst into an orchestral tutti engulfing the audience. In addition to the work's Romantic quality, the relationship between the orchestra and piano soloist also contributed to the concert's theme of "marriage." Throughout the work the two frequently share, develop and contrast thematic ideas.

The soloist, Anne-Marie McDermott, not only performed with technical exactitude, but also delivered an animated interpretation. McDermott had a bit of Mozart in her stage presence. Her frequent gestures to the orchestra demonstrated her comprehension of ensemble parts, as if she herself were the composer playing the solo part. At one moment, during the third movement, McDermott held up her hand as she finished a musical idea, and cued the orchestra's entrance.

McDermott's playing style is versatile. She intensified the delicacy of some ideas and the storminess of others. In the final movement, preceding the final cadenza, her crescendo of a descending melodic gesture was applied with such intensity that she practically handed cascades of sound to the orchestra.

The orchestra adjusted well to McDermott's ambitious tempo. Also, unison melodic lines were clear and the volume well balanced.

Following intermission, the Oregon Mozart Players performed Beethoven's exuberant Symphony No. 8. The orchestra's size was authentic to an ensemble that would have performed the work during Beethoven's time. Cortese's brisk tempo set the orchestra on cruise control. The quick, but comfortable drive demonstrated the orchestra's focus and precision. Beethoven's frequent melodic fragmentation and passing of ideas were all heard with clarity.

Overall, the concert was vibrant and energetic. For me, Rodrigo's work was the most exotic, Mozart's introspective, and Beethoven's downright fun. The Mozart Players performed at their best. I sensed I was not the only one that left with a positive energy I had not come with. It was as if the works on the program were played for the first time.

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