

## CONCERT REVIEW

# Chamber orchestra battles acoustics issues

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When a group calls its concert “The Great Classicists,” we expect the music to display order and decorum and the composers to be Mozart and Haydn.

Saturday at the Eugene First Christian Church, the Oregon Mozart Players, under the direction of Glen Cortese, delivered those composers and their orderly musical styles, along with a substantial symphony by Franz Schubert.

The church’s resonant acoustics, its intimate setting and the small orchestral forces immersed the audience in a kind of Schubertiad, an occasion when Schubert’s friends gathered in his home to listen to his latest works. It was a concert where the players’ deftness and sureness were spoiled only by problems of instrumental imbalance.

The concert caught each of these composers when he was in the early stages of his career, in two cases when the musician was younger than 20. It is a sign of the musical genius of each that these early works made for a very satisfying program.

W.A. Mozart’s teenage brilliance was evident in his glorious “Exsultate, jubilate,” a vocal tour-de-force that follows both Italian operatic and symphonic forms. Laura Decher Wayte took on the task of singing its lengthy solo, which demands formidable coloratura, expressive legatos and agile recitative.

Wayte succeeded admirably.

She employs her instrument with warmth, extension and ease. Although she avoided the coloratura usually associated with the first cadenza, her passage work was excellent save for her lack of a trill.

Her expressive abilities were on full display in the Andante. The performance was marred only by the orchestra overwhelming Wayte at times.

F.J. Haydn’s innovative tendencies were on display in one of his rare organ concerti. Written early in his career, at 23, his work evinces in the first movement an early version of the sonata-allegro form.

John Jantzi handled the keyboard solo, for the most part, with the dexterity demanded by the many ornamental additions Haydn made — one assumes, in youthful vigor. However, the orchestra’s lower strings, particularly the violas, overpowered the small number of violins, creating an imbalance that was distracting.

I sat in a listening position that I consider optimal, near the center of the hall and a decent number of rows back, yet I was not the only one to notice this

peculiarity. Problems with imbalance should be corrected in rehearsal.

Schubert straddles the Classical and Romantic periods, but his early work leaves no doubt that he was influenced by Mozart and Haydn. Not yet 20 when he composed this elegant piece, he produced the recognizable four-movement symphonic form.

Cortese led the 30-minute work stylishly, emphasizing the clear classical form but also highlighting the romantic harmonies that crop up periodically. This time the orchestra was in better balance, in part because the woodwinds were able to support the violins.

The first movement, the Allegro, was particularly excellent. The violins played with beauty in the Andante, and the woodwinds were sterling throughout.

The G-minor minuet added an unusual flavor to the work because the third movement in a Classical symphony is rarely in a minor key. The last movement was a stirring conclusion to a youthful, enchanting symphony.

The Oregon Mozart Players is a group to be cherished, and the First Christian Church is an ideal venue for this chamber orchestra. But the acoustics should not be taken for granted.

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