

Demerjian Chamber shows brassy side

Burt Saidel



And the award for most innovative program goes to... the envelope please. It is the Dayton Philharmonic Demerjian Chamber Exploration Series - *Brass and Percussion*.

The Philharmonic commemorates music in so many ways. The latest Chamber Concert broke new ground with Maestro Patrick Reynolds' innovative display of the joy of blaring horns and sticks hitting all forms of surfaces.

The Philharmonic gave their string, woodwind and keyboard colleagues a week off. The stage was filled with gleaming brass and an assortment of drums, cymbals and gongs, all of which were attached to great artists.

Maestro Patrick introduced each number giving charming and interesting details of the unusual music. The concert opened with a blood-stirring march by 16th century Englishman William Byrd. Hearing the marvelous cacophony of the brass and percussion, I could only imagine a troop, in full regalia, turning a corner in Hyde Park during King Charles' reign.

Next, a visit to St. Marks Cathedral in Venice. Composer Giovanni Gabrieli used every corner of St. Mark's Duomo to place his multiple choirs of musicians. Maestro Patrick did the same, dividing his brass players into three choirs with intoxicating effect.

The brass players were banished from the stage to be replaced by two timpanists, Michael LaMattina, principal percussionist and Donald Donnett, principal timpanist. We were treated to our first ever solo timpani work, a march by Jacques Philidor. Both drummers were very, very busy. The 17th century piece was dashing and exciting but I couldn't hum even a line of it.

Tchaikovsky returned to the Schuster after his gala season-opening classical concert. His lovely *Romance* was transcribed from solo piano to brass band. This familiar

and tuneful work did not fit comfortably with the vast sound of the horns. There were moments of great excitement and sheer loveliness. Particularly the "romance" theme, played by Ashley Hall's trumpet, stirred the feelings of the original work.

The music of Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu is finding an important place in the classical repertory. His *Raintree*, an impressionistic reverie, got a most unusual setting on three vibraphones and tiny banks of cymbals. Led by Michael LaMattina with two of his colleagues, they created a magnificent tapestry of sound, full of sensuous overtones and delicate tinkling of bells.

The final work was Leonard Bernstein's familiar *West Side Story* suite. The orchestra had a romp and so did the audience. The horn players, busy juggling their various mutes, let us see how engaging sounds are made.

For the *Mambo* section, Maestro Patrick rehearsed the audience in shouting "Mambo" at the appropriate moment. As a critic, I must report that the artists on the stage were vastly superior to the shouts from the audience. We need to work on that!

Two surprising plays - *Cabaret* and *Lend Me a Tenor*

Dayton has been called "The City of Inventions." Rightly so! I can add another epithet for our burgeoning theater life - "The City of Surprises." Two recent plays, the Dayton Playhouse's *Cabaret* and The Human Race's *Lend Me a Tenor*, were both great surprises.

Let me explain. *Cabaret* is a classic adaptation of the Van Druten play *I Am a Camera*. It evokes the decadence of Berlin at the end of the 1920s and the rise of Nazi power. It has also been done again and again. My wife and I can remember eight performances we have seen at various venues over the past decades.

I expected more of the same from the Dayton Playhouse production which, unfortunately, closed on September 13th. That was surprise number one.

Directed by Chris Harmon, who designed the uniquely evocative set, the play surpassed anything in our memory. Numbers which we did not know existed were restored to

the score making formerly minor characters become fully rounded and important.

The sexy, and they were quite lovely and very sexy parading around in lingerie, Kit Kat Girls were augmented ingeniously with an equal number of Kit Kat Boys. The men, usually waiters or other functionaries, were handsome in briefs and bare chests. They intensified the sexual and dramatic tension of the play.

As the leads, Sally Bowles and her American lover Clifford, Danika Haffenden and John-Michael Lander gave portrayals touched by the hopelessness of their situation and that of the world around them.

The elderly landlady and her Jewish beau are usually forgettable in the grand scheme of the play. In the fully restored version, master actors Dr. Charles Larkowski and Dodie Lockwood took this relationship to the very center of the developing tragedy.

The spirit, perhaps evil spirit, of the play is the Maser of Ceremonies. He represents and celebrates the decadent life which abounded to be washed under by Hitler and his gangs. Matt Curry is a marvelous actor. His previous roles have shown that promise. In this part, the promise came true.

Strong performances by Emily Fultz, Bob Martin and Sandra Hyde joined the rest of the cast and musicians in making this the best imaginable *Cabaret*.

Lend Me a Tenor was produced at The Human Race's Loft Theatre. I have seen the play twice and disliked it immensely. We attended out of a sense of duty and with the belief that Joe Deer, a master director, would make the best of a bad apple.

That was surprise number two. The cast led by Aaron Vega and Clare Kennedy (a real husband-wife team), Tim Lile, Caitlan Larsen and Richard Marlatt made slapstick into a surgical operation. I'm happy to report that the operation was a complete success and the patient lived.

Played on a truly opulent set by Dick Block, the cast, which included Allison Moody, Jeff Newman and Deb Colvin-Tener, gave everyone a romp to be remembered. You can still be surprised through Sept. 27. Try it. You will laugh yourself silly.

DAI Oktoberfest slated Sept. 26 & 27

The Dayton Art Institute will host its 38th annual Oktoberfest on Saturday, Sept. 26 and Sunday, Sept. 27. Under the leadership of Oktoberfest chairs Nancy & Bill Chifala of Oakwood, this popular community event boasts a dazzling display of artisan pieces, unique food items, ample domestic, international and craft beers and delicious international wines. Live music will be featured on two stages throughout the weekend.

The Oktoberfest Preview Party takes place on Friday, Sept. 25, from 7 - 11 p.m. Preview Party guests enjoy complimentary draft beer and wine

and a more relaxing, less crowded atmosphere. They also have the first opportunity to purchase beautiful hand crafted wares by local and national artisans. The popular Steely Dan tribute band Aja will provide entertainment at the Preview Party.

FREE parking and shuttle service are available Saturday and Sunday, making it easy to get to Oktoberfest. Patrons may park downtown and catch an RTA bus along Main Street, Fifth Street or Second Street. There is no charge for the RTA bus ride to Oktoberfest.

Oktoberfest hours are noon - 11 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 26, and noon - 7

p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 27. Pre-sale tickets for Oktoberfest are priced at \$4 for adults and seniors and \$2 for students (ages 7-18). Children 6 and under are free. Pre-sale tickets may be purchased at Arrow Wine & Spirits, Dorothy Lane Markets, National City Bank (now a part of PNC), Borders Books and Music, and The Dayton Art Institute. Tickets may also be purchased online at www.daytonartinstitute.org.

Oktoberfest tickets purchased at the gate are priced at \$6 for adults, \$4 for seniors (60+) and \$3 for students (ages 7-18). Children 6 and under are free.

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