

# Symphony season kickoff invigorates audience

By JON C. PETERSON

## REVIEW

LIMA — Adventurous programming and masterful execution were the hallmarks of Saturday evening's Lima Symphony Orchestra season-opening concert.

Embarking on its 58th season, the LSO, under the batons of Crafton Beck and guest conductor and donor Clyde Rauch, enthralled the audience with a command of repertoire one would expect from a long-established symphony orchestra, yet the freshness of their musical interpretation left the audience longing for more.

The concert opened serenely as Beck stepped onto his beautifully crafted new podium to conduct the orchestra in "Gigues" from Claude Debussy's "Images for Orchestra." The ethereal character of this impressionistic musical tapestry served as a sublimely unique prelude to the concert and to the season.

Though purposefully not the upbeat dance most would expect of a traditional jig, Debussy's setting calls for meticulous dynamic subtlety and orchestral balance, both of which the LSO artfully delivered. Particularly noteworthy were the mellifluous solo passages for the oboe d'amore, a double-reed instrument invented some 200 years before the composition of this piece; the graceful shaping and seamless phrasing of these lines filled the hall with an unrivaled sense of sweetness and serenity.

Beck passed the baton to guest conductor Clyde Rauch for the performance of "Im Sturmschritt! Polka schnell" (literally, "In the storm-step! Fast polka") by Johann Strauss Jr. Rauch, LSO board member and president/CEO of Tuttle Services Inc., won the opportunity to conduct the LSO at last year's wine-tasting auction and proved to be much more than a generous benefactor of the orchestra with his commanding conducting debut.

This spirited dance sprung to life with animated rhythms that were skillfully shaped by the entire ensemble, though the upper strings displayed a markedly exceptional understanding and interpretation of Strauss' exuberant writing.

The capstone of the first half of the program was Franz Liszt's Second Piano Concerto, a fitting selection for this, the bicentennial year of the composer's birth. Beck and the LSO welcomed Elida native and critically acclaimed pianist Paul Barnes to the stage for a breathtaking performance of this virtuosic concerto for piano and orchestra.

Barnes, president of the Franz Liszt Society, captivated the audience with an unparalleled Lisztian virtuosity that was balanced with an interpretive sensitivity that few pianists can achieve. The orchestra displayed moments of remarkable agility, though there were occasions when we were reminded of the humanity that is inherent in live musical performance.

Principal cellist Eric Hoffman charmed the audience with the silky richness of his solo passage and his subsequent musical conversation with Barnes.

All in all, this daring collaboration between Beck, Barnes and the orchestra resulted in a winning combination, paying tremendous artistic dividends that few regional orchestras have the opportunity to experience.

The second half of the concert proved to be the highlight of the evening with the performance of Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 in D minor. Orchestral balance was stellar as were the powerful dynamic contrasts that the orchestra accomplished with seeming effortlessness. The chilling pianissimo passages of the third movement brought listeners to the edge of their seats, while strong, climactic passages in the first and final movements swept across the auditorium, astonishing the audience. More than one concertgoer uttered the word "invigorating" at the close of the concert.

Writing his fifth symphony in 1937 while Russia was under Stalin's control, Shostakovich did not enjoy the artistic freedoms that we, perhaps, take for granted today. The composer admitted that even the apparent rejoicing character of the final movement was forced, not freely expressed.

As Saturday night's performance was dedicated to the life and legacy of Daniel Pearl, the violinist and reporter for The Wall Street Journal who was killed by terrorists in Pakistan shortly after 9/11, we are even further reminded of the power of music to supersede the differences that divide us even today.

Through his composition, Shostakovich was able to gently assimilate political expectations with his own personal artistic expression. Similarly, the musicians on Saturday evening succeeded in elevating the spirits and appreciation of a diverse audience. This concert was truly a meaningful memorial to Daniel Pearl.

Beck and the LSO have set the bar very high for the upcoming season. You will certainly not want to miss "Scaling Infinity," the LSO's next concert on Nov. 12. This performance will feature the music of Vaughan Williams, Richard Strauss and Tchaikovsky, as the orchestra invites violinist Stefan Milenkovich to the stage.

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