

LancasterOnline.com

Symphonic success

'Tango Meets the Blues' program brings three standing ovations

By NICOLETTE M. NORRIS, Correspondent
Intelligencer Journal

Published: Jan 12, 2008 3:03 AM EST



LANCASTER COUNTY, PA

REVIEW: Symphony

This weekend, Lancaster Symphony Orchestra embraces head-on an ambitious program of 20th-century rhythmic works. Entitled "Tango Meets the

Blues," the performance fuses classical forms with dance rhythms.

The eclectic program opens with "Elevator Music," by Australian Graeme Koehne. But concertgoers expecting bland background music are in for a surprise. Koehne's music is anything but bland. Think Ravel meets Albeniz.

The forward-driving urgency of "Elevator Music" is only occasionally interrupted by legato strings, a playful piccolo and flute duet and a bluesy clarinet solo. The major rhythmic themes continually reassert themselves and drive this work forward. The percussion section, never far at bay, finally thrusts the orchestra forward to a thrilling conclusion.

World-renowned blues harmonica player Corky Siegel wrote the evening's next work, Concerto for Harmonica. It only takes a moment to accustom yourself to the fact that a harmonica is soloing with a symphony.

It's as though Siegel is singing, rather than playing an instrument. The small harmonica is so much an extension of his breath and emotion. He bobs, swoops and grins approval to the orchestra. Siegel's joyful gyrations never stop.

Siegel partially faces the orchestra throughout the piece. This is a symphonic jam session, and Siegel is one with "the band." Harmonica Concerto is an invigorating and adventurous work — soulful playing by a consummate performer, and an energetic fusion of classical and blues.

Ástor Piazzolla's Concerto for Bandoneón is written for an accordion-like instrument whose history is shared with that of the tango.

Piazzolla is widely credited with having revived the tango form, and it is his Argentinian godson, Marcelo Nisinman, who solos with the symphony on this rhythmic work.

At times exuberant, at times mournful, this concerto is a very evocative work, packed with color and emotion.

The sensual ending of the second movement, with its final delicate harp arpeggio, is one of the evening's most magical moments.

The notes dwindle to near inaudibility and you find yourself straining to hear more. An emotionally charged final movement brings this work to a close.

The program ends with a beloved symphonic classic — Respighi's tone poem "The Pines of Rome." While it may be the most mainstream of the evening's

selections, it is by no means staid. The audience is transported to evocative landscapes of Rome in a distant time.

That Respighi is the colorist heir of his teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov, is more than evident through all three movements.

The third section, "Pines of the Janiculum," paints a lovely nocturnal background for tender solos by clarinet, oboe and violin.

Seamlessly, the soft trills of a nightingale emerge into the aural landscape. Listeners are lulled into a sweet slumber, but not for long.

Soon we hear faraway drumbeats, heralding the arrival of the Roman Legions along the ancient Appian Way.

One of the most spectacular crescendos in symphonic literature is heard here, and with great fanfare, Maestro Stephen Gunzenhauser masterfully exacts it from his players to the very final triumphant chords of this work.

The breadth of the string section in such a relatively small orchestra is astounding.

Gunzenhauser says in his pre-concert lecture that the symphony's aim is to challenge, entertain and inspire.

It succeeded.

© 2004-2007 Lancaster Newspapers
PO Box 1328, Lancaster PA 17608, (717) 291-8811
[Terms of Service](#) [Privacy Policy](#)