



Cabrillo Music Festival Musical Director Marin Alsop conducts the orchestra during Friday night's performance. Dan Coyro/Sentinel

A riveting success

The Cabrillo Music Festival widens its appeal under conductor Marin Alsop

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A FLURRY OF weekend activity preceded a dramatic close for the Cabrillo Music Festival: two concerts by the full orchestra, a program by the Turtle Island String Quartet, a panel discussion with composers, and an all-day Art and Food Festival which drew great crowds to the Civic Auditorium and nearby streets.

The weekend's concerts underlined the here-and-now orientation of this year's Festival. The music was essentially all American (even Stravinsky, whose "Symphony In Three Movements" was performed Friday claimed American citizenship in his later years), and spanned only the past 50 years.

The Festival's dynamic new Music Director, Marin Alsop, led Friday night's performance, which also included orchestral works by Copland, Joan Tower, Toru Takemitsu (another American emigre) and David Balakrishnan of the Turtle Island String Quartet. On Saturday, the Turtle Island String Quartet presented an afternoon of lively musical concoctions, and that evening Alsop led the full orchestra in music by Joseph Schwanter, Chris Brown, John

Cage, and Lou Harrison. She capped the evening — and the Festival — by directing the combined forces of the Festival orchestra and Cheryl Anderson's Cabrillo Symphonic Chorus in Leonard Bernstein's "Chichester Psalms."

From 11 a.m. Saturday, an Art and Food Festival stretched down the street in front of the Civic, displaying local culinary, musical and artistic talent including dancing in the street. A lunchtime panel discussion in the City Hall plaza allowed the audience to interact with Alsop and four of the composers represented in this year's Festival.

The Festival ended with a truly riveting performance of Bernstein's "Chichester Psalms." Alsop studied with Bernstein, and became a close personal friend and colleague. It was appropriate to end her first, extremely successful season as festival director with a tribute to her mentor. The tribute was also an impressive community effort. The 120-voice chorus, prepared by Cheryl Anderson with the Cabrillo College Chorus as its core, drew singers from numerous church choirs and other local choral groups, and included the directors of several choirs as singers themselves. Thirteen-year-old Nikolaus Nackley, treble, beautifully sang the solo role.



David Balakrishnan and Darol Anger of the Turtle Island String Quartet play as Marin Alsop conducts a flock of strings Friday. Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Composer-in-Residence Joseph Schwanter was featured Saturday with his third work of this Festival, "A Sudden Rainbow." This purely orchestral work displayed Schwanter's considerable skill in developing musical ideas even more clearly than had his previous works, where structure hinged on the sung texts. The music glinted with bright "reflections" from overlapping instrumental echoes.

An orchestration of John Cage's "Suite for Toy Piano" by the ever-engaging Lou Harrison of Aptos was a major work Saturday. An extra treat, not in the program, was hearing the Cage piece in its original version for toy piano alone. Alsop explained that they were not sure they could obtain an "appropriate instrument," but there it was on stage, a toy piano, in all its two-foot high splendor (loaned by local aficionado Bruce Bratton.)

Emily Wong George gamely played the Cage piece with sensitive expression on this plinking little instrument (as Alsop gravely turned pages for her). In the orchestral version, Harrison transformed the tones from tinny to sonorous, and gently expanded the dramatic scope, all the while keeping the simplicity of the original melody lines.

Two dramatic fanfares opened

Friday's program. Copland's rousing "Fanfare for the Common Man" was followed by "Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman" by Joan Tower, which was full of bright, brassy exuberance and galloping rhythms. Flashy tympani work by Charles Dowd added exciting thunder.

The Turtle Island String Quartet performed "Spider Dreams," by their own David Balakrishnan Friday. Loosely speaking, the work is a concerto for string quartet and orchestra. The Turtle Island players' instruments were electronically amplified to stand above the string orchestra. The music successfully blended styles outside of classical music — jazz, bluegrass, rock, even Indian raga — with the classical. The orchestra performed admirably — especially by meeting the demands of the lively country fiddle tunes. In Turtle Island's Saturday afternoon solo concert of jazz and pop, those pieces which included classical elements were the most effective.

All in all, this year's performances proved the Festival is secure in the more-than-capable hands of Alsop, who took conscious strides toward making the music accessible to a wider audience. Under her direction the Cabrillo Music Festival should be a big plus in revitalizing Santa Cruz in the years ahead.



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Marin Alsop whistles her appreciation to the Cabrillo Music Festival orchestra at the end of Friday night's performance.