

Cabrillo Festival

MUSIC Festival

opens with a bang

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The Cabrillo Music Festival opened Friday night in full-voiced measure with an orchestral program of most wondrous sonorities conducted by Dennis Russell Davies.

The strong acoustic currents inside Holy Cross Church stirred the works of Brahms, Nordheim, Overton and Curtis-Smith into majestic blends and clashes which by-and-large enhanced the composers' coloristic aims.

Nordheim's "Spur for Accordion and Orchestra" and Overton's "Sonorities for Orchestra" elaborated primarily in the spectral realm, favoring timbral identities over melodic/rhythmic ones. Curtis-Smith's "The Great American Symphony (GAS)" was like the Dadaists at Mariott's Great America: a cornucopia of Americana that juggled everything from Ives to the Ventures and bounced off the walls like the Marx Brothers.

Brahms' "Variations on a Theme by Hayden, Op. 50" ushered in the moderns with glowing regality.

Review

"Variations" structural clarity was ornamented with exquisite orchestral shadings and contrapuntal devices. Brahms' technique, worked on behalf of a grand dramatic outline, encompassing a wide range of expressive climates within the theme's familiar territory of scope over the orchestra.

Davies' remarkable (so what else is new?), Brahms' best advantage, while arching an agile play of tempi that met in tight complicity with the conging moods of "Variations."

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The festival orchestra gave this oft-played repertoire item a worthwhile going-over. The winds were particularly arresting, bound in consonance and unified in nuance.

The single most distinguishing claim to Nordheim's "Spur" was the accordion, which soloist Myriam Bonnin performed most convincingly. Nordheim spread the accordion's dominion by means of stereophonic amplification, which along with the antiphonal percussion layout, created a sumptuous mingling of masses in the chapel.

The sustained, wind-blown gamut of sonorities offered by the accordion was reflected thoroughly in the orchestration. Both bodies breathed in a mysterious chromatic abyss, void of tangible rhythmic grounds. In short it was suggestive of something Dali might wish to paint on his backboard.

Overton's position in the concert (following Nordheim) was a miscalculation, for by that time one's patience for static and special effects was threadbare. Nonetheless, Overton's use of color was well-focused and charted in digestible form.

Distinct timbral plateaus segued and overlapped in mobile-like fashion, building to a clamorous mid-point confluence before subsiding to final rest. Like Mondrian's solid blocks of color, Overton's orchestral chemistry was made up of various timbral units that held their own identities amid complex layerings.

After the Overton work, Curtis-Smith's "The Great American Symphony" came on like ghostbusters. It was a gargantuan pastiche of uniquely supple ingenuity. The composer weaved blues/jazz and other indigenous musical identities into serious contemporary contexts with consummate facility.

Tempo, meter and tonalities were wielded with handyman dexterity, counterpointing incompatible extremities with extraordinary diplomacy. His contrapuntal escapades carried Charles Ives' studies to inspired refinement, with unity and contrast ever at each others' throat, but always under the composer's judicious governing.

In teasing reverence to our melting-pot country, "The Great American Symphony" combined delicious timbral indulgences, borrowings of every kind, formalistic sleight-of-hand and transparent orchestral counterpoints to score an out-of-the-park grand slam home run.

The wide sonic lens of Friday night's concert showcased the Cabrillo Music Festival Orchestra's amazing flexibility and ensemble strength in starkly contrasted conditions. Together with Davies' deft leadership, they invested the evening's demanding scores with precision and spirit.