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Cabrillo Festival, Quality-Plus

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Had you asked either the local citizenry or those knowledgeable in the music world 16 years ago whether Santa Cruz would have been capable of supporting the major music festival on the West Coast, the reaction would have been more than derisive snorts.

After 15 seasons, the Cabrillo Music Festival has grown on us to the point that we forget how special it really is. Year after year, it has attracted the top classical and contemporary composers and musicians from all over the globe.

And, to the surprise of many, this community has consistently supported the gargantuan effort. Musical festivals are commonplace in Europe because they act as a surefire tourist magnet, drawing in all the Americans abroad who can say they dipped their ears in the holy sounds of Salzburg, Bayreuth, Interlaken and Munich.

Chances are, however, the streams of visitors from over the hill aren't bent on hearing Dennis Russell Davies conduct John Cage's "Quartets for 41 Instruments", or surveying the possibilities of the Electric Weasel Ensemble tooting away on Johanna M. Beyer's world premiere of "Music of the Spheres."

Many of those who attended this year's festival weren't particularly impressed by the two aforementioned pieces, either, but that doesn't mean they didn't show up. The 1977 edition of the Festival attracted nearly 7,000 music

lovers of all stripes, with every concert but one a complete sell-out.

Considering the Festival's main showcase, the Cabrillo College Theater, only seats 550, that's a considerable accomplishment. It's also valid proof that musical director Davies' theory of bringing the Festival to the people is working just fine.

Above all, it's the quality of selections and players that distinguishes the Cabrillo festival. Davies' standards are exceedingly high in terms of composition and musicianship, so we have seen the likes of Carlos Chavez, Kenneth Rexroth, William Masselos, Beth Anderson, Keith Jarrett, Anthony Newman, and this year, John Cage and Janos Starker.

That's a hefty roster for any music festival, but the fact of Santa Cruz actively supporting the imports, along with homegrown composers such as Aptos' world-famous Lou Harrison, makes Cabrillo's annual summer outing particularly impressive.

Operating on a slim \$63,000 budget, the Festival this year recouped \$20,000 in ticket sales, with attendance rising from 80 per cent capacity to nearly 100 per cent. Season subscribers grew from 132 last year to 220 this year, an enthusiastic group of backers, as clearly evinced by this year's comfortable prelude concert.

The informality, casual dress and general good spirits that pervade the Festival add to its allure, once again a tribute to Davies' careful tutelage. When half of the musicians on stage are in blue

jeans, and the rest in coats and ties, it's clearly the music that counts.

There is only one drawback to the festival, really a drawback to the entire county. Despite its best efforts, the Cabrillo Theatre is simply not a concert hall. Sound bounces off the curved roof, the acoustic panels do next to nothing, and the winds have to struggle to compete with the strings.

Using makeshift churches, halls and missions as performing spaces is great for the populace, but sadly, doesn't do much for the music. With the superior level of sound coming out of the festival orchestra's instruments, the lack of an adequate performing facility is slowly killing the Festival's greatest resource: its music.

The time has come for Santa Cruz to get off the stick and make the commitment that will guarantee the growth and success of the Cabrillo Music Festival. As the inadequacies of the civic auditorium become more and more obvious, and with the Del Mar Theatre soon to become a triplex movie house, there's simply no place else to go.

A performing arts center, or concert hall, or whatever the generic term, has become a necessity. Not only will the acoustics be improved, but the hundreds of potential ticket buyers who were turned away this year can be accommodated in comfort and style.

If Santa Cruz wants to hang onto the Cabrillo Music Festival, it had better shape up, or sometime down the road, the Festival will ship out.