

OSO ends season on high note

What a way to finish a 50th anniversary season – featuring two composers, one classical, the other contemporary.

I refer to the Okanagan Symphony which held the final concert of the season Friday night with the music of Imant Raminsh and Ludwig van Beethoven – a stunning programming move.

Beethoven is considered by many to be one of the greatest classical composers, and Raminsh is a renowned contemporary. It was a treat to hear the differences and similarities between the two. Both used the resources of a full orchestra, large chorus and four soloists.

Quaternity: A Cantata of Seasons was commissioned by the OSO and partners for the world premiere here. It is a well-constructed work with a contemporary flair without being overly dissonant.

Having heard a number of Raminsh's compositions, I found this to be one of his best. It moved from melodic, sweeping phrases to shimmering strings, to strong pulsating rhythms and dramatic climaxes. This is a challenging work, and the performers met the challenges.

The orchestra was dynamic and lyrical, displaying its customary fine musicianship. The chorus was well prepared, but because of the acoustics of the hall, we only heard about a third of the sound, the rest went up into the overhead curtains, creating frequent imbalances of dynamics. Some sort of overhead baffle



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Review

to direct the sound into the audience might correct that. The four soloists were adequate, but their diction was not really clear. The audience clearly enjoyed Quaternity and gave enthusiastic applause to the composer and performers.

What can be said of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony that has not already been said? A monumental work, considered by many to be one of his best, it offers a complete musical experience.

Under the expressive conducting of Rosemary Thomson, the orchestra and chorus (105 singers) really shone. There was excellent unison playing near the beginning giving a sense of expectancy, then moving from the bravura to the lyrical.

The playing was particularly expressive in the Adagio movement. Thomson discarded the baton and used hands only to shape the phrases. The players responded with wonderful musicianship.

A couple of times the Tympani seemed out of synch and there was a

noticeable off pitch note from the brass section. These were minor flaws, no doubt corrected for the ensuing performances.

The chorus sang with vigour and enthusiasm, well-controlled phrasing and good intonation, capturing the essence of the third movement. They were obviously well rehearsed, but suffered the same loss of forward sound as in the first half

Tenor soloist Peter Collins, has a clear tone with plenty of power well suited to the evening. Likewise baritone/bass Randall Jakobsht, who gave a powerful performance, particularly in the opening notes. Soprano Heidi Muendel and mezzo Judith Forst were less successful, each having a pronounced vibrato, which I felt was unsuitable for the works. In addition, I felt the soprano was having some difficulty sustaining pitch in the upper range. She seemed to struggle with the top notes.

In spite of these minor shortcomings, the evening was one to long remember, not only for the creative programming, but for sheer joy of sound that was produced. Once again, the OSO is to be commended for bringing such an exciting end to a successful season.

Marvin Dickau is an organist, pianist and conductor who has an A.Mus. from the University of Alberta. He has conducted choirs and small orchestras, given solo piano and organ recitals and accompanied many singers and instrumentalists in Kelowna and Calgary.