



Katherine Balch, *composer-in-residence*

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Music

California Symphony season closer

By Joshua Kosman May 7, 2018

Haochen Zhang, the young Chinese virtuoso who shared the gold medal at the 2009 Van Cliburn Competition, turned up at the Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek on Sunday, May 6, to help Music Director Donato Cabrera and the California Symphony wind up their concert season together.

Starting the program was the world premiere of “Like a Broken Clock,” a charming 10-minute curtain-raiser by Katherine Balch, who is beginning a three-year term as the orchestra’s composer-in-residence. There are more offerings still to come from her — the 2018-19 season concludes with a new violin concerto — but for now this character piece was more than enough to whet a listener’s appetite.



Katherine Balch unveils a new orchestral work in Walnut Creek

The title sums the piece up nicely — it’s a landscape of off-kilter ticks and tocks that dance their way nimbly through the orchestra. Most of the tick-tock comes from the string players, who tap the bodies of their instruments with their fingers, pluck the strings or let the wood of their bows bounce percussively off the strings. The woodwinds and brass, meanwhile, provide sustained whooshes of harmony without which the piece would be too dry and desiccated to appreciate.

And then things flip around, as things tend to do. The woodwinds start exploring the idea of disconnected little notes, the strings take over the harmonies, and everyone joins hands in a vivacious climax. **This is vividly imagined music, and Cabrera and the orchestra gave it an evocative reading.**

Joshua Kosman is The San Francisco Chronicle’s music critic.

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/music/article/A-fiery-piano-virtuoso-joins-the-California-12894287.php>