



Chris Rogerson, *composer*

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Spokane Symphony season opens with modern, classical works

Larry Lapidus | The Spokesman-Review | September 22, 2014

In the inaugural concert of the 2014-15 Spokane Symphony season on Saturday at the Martin Woldson Theater at the Fox, music director Eckart Preu wasted no time in demonstrating how he and the orchestra came to win a prestigious award for adventurous programming. Rather than choosing to open with a cheerful overture by Rossini, Preu offered a serious recent work, “Noble Pond,” a 2009 composition by the gifted American composer Chris Rogerson.

In “Noble Pond,” Rogerson crystallizes his emotional response to a news story about the accidental death of a young boy hit by a stray bullet while fishing with his father at a pond near Noble, Oklahoma. Although this did seem an eccentric choice to kick off a musical season, it actually proved ideal. The piece employs a large orchestra and requires great skill and control. It begins with the faintest wash of color and grows steadily, as one instrument after another, led by the passionate playing of principal cello John Marshall, raises its voice to lament the tragic unreliability of life.

At its conclusion, the audience remained silent for a few moments before bursting into enthusiastic applause, a testament to its profound impact. It illustrates the power of new music as well as old to transform and enrich our lives, a theme the orchestra has undertaken for the current season.

The evening took a more cheerful turn with the appearance of the piano team of Sivan Silver and Gil Garburg. An earlier scheduled appearance was canceled after Garburg sustained an injury from a fall. Apparently, no long-term harm was done, as he and Silver (they are husband and wife) were swept up by the audience in a veritable lovefest of enthusiasm and affection. They performed two works, the Concerto No. 2 in C major for Two Keyboards and Strings by J.S. Bach (1730), and Felix Mendelssohn’s Concerto in E major for Two Pianos and Orchestra of 1823.

Some piano duos try to match their tone and phrasing so perfectly that no one can detect which of the pair is playing. Silver and Garburg are not such a duo. While their sensitivity to each other’s playing is supernaturally acute, they are quite different in technique and artistic character. Silver’s tone is intense and sharply focused. In contrast, Garburg’s technique is elegantly poised and relaxed, caressing the keyboard to produce a tone that is warm and velvety. The result is a delightful interplay of color and character, enabling the audience to hear more in the music than would have been possible with a more homogenized performance.