

A sparkle of hope



North State Symphony
conductor Scott Seaton.
PHOTO BY SESAR SANCHEZ

Symphony delivers powerfully emotional season finale

Like many people who came of age at the dawn of the television era, my initial experience hearing classical music was subliminal. It was that stuff in the background of movies and TV shows that telegraphed how viewers were supposed to feel about what was happening on the screen. Later in life I discovered that—long before TV or radio, or even records—people listened to music live, as a communal experience.

by
Carey
Wilson

Review:
North State
Symphony,
Masterworks 4:
Pathos and Hope,
Sunday, May 12, at
Laxson Auditorium,
Chico State.

Attending the North State Symphony's season-capping concert last Sunday (May 12) at Laxson Auditorium—and listening to the music with an attentive audience and an orchestra of skilled and disciplined humans applying their craft and sensibility to create a sonic experience that illuminated universal feelings and our shared humanity—was a testament to the power of live music.

The Mother's Day matinee began with a piece originally scheduled for last November's symphony program, which was postponed in the wake of the Camp Fire. Beethoven's 1807 "Overture for Coriolan" was played in collaboration with the Butte Music Teachers Association of California Youth Orchestra, and the piece—written for Heinrich Joseph von Collin's 1804 tragic play, *Coriolan*—had a narrative quality that fit seamlessly with the concert's title of "Pathos and Hope."

Supremely evocative of love and loss, the originally scheduled opening piece, Samuel Barber's 1936 "Adagio for Strings" (played behind the broadcast announcements of both Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy's deaths), stripped the orchestra down to nothing but stringed instruments. And the somber, low-volume presentation gracefully emphasized the "pathos"

aspect of the program's theme.

The centerpiece of the concert, featuring visiting piano virtuoso Yinuo Wang, was Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg's 1868 *Piano Concerto in A minor*, Op. 16, which required rearranging the stage to feature a grand piano up front, as well as squeeze in the full orchestra to support the young pianist's delivery of this well-known piece.

The concerto begins with a bombastic kettle drum introduction and soaring strings that go on to complement and enhance piano parts that range from dramatic, full-chord pounding to delicate trilling. It was a fun thrill ride of instrumental virtuosity and raw emotion that resulted in a well-deserved prolonged standing ovation.

At that point, it seemed like any follow-up would be an afterthought or an anticlimax, but intermissions are designed to counteract such reductive assessments. A chilled beer, purchased in the theater foyer and quaffed on the outside patio among the well-dressed, mostly senior crowd put me in an open-minded space to enjoy the presentation of Johannes Brahms's final major symphonic composition, *Symphony No. 4 in E minor*, Op. 98.

In his spoken introduction to the piece, conductor Scott Seaton pointed out that "it really is a journey, searching for something—and for [him] it was pretty much about unattainability—but for [the audience] there are lots of moments of divine hope in the music."

The four movements of this 41-minute masterwork employ all sections of the orchestra to manifest a range of emotions, from the gentle lament of the strings to the adamant, almost angry assertions of the combined brass and timpani. But my favorite aspect of the piece was the use of the humble triangle as a featured instrument. Its chiming notes scintillated over the entire orchestra, demonstrating by musical metaphor that one tiny voice—a sparkle of hope, perhaps—can alter perception and meaning no matter how loud the world gets. □



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