

CONCERT REVIEW

**Collaborative program a fitting tribute to Mozart**

By Peter Bergquist

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The Oregon Mozart Players served a banquet of their namesake's best orchestral, church and operatic music for their "Happy Birthday to Wolfgang!" concert Friday night in Silva Hall.

A near-full house indulged in a splendid performance by the orchestra, led by Glen Cortese, and world-class guest artists and two local groups who joined them.

The opening number was the Overture to "The Marriage of Figaro," conducted not by Cortese but by David Ogden Stiers.

This was not just a celebrity cameo appearance. Stiers has considerable musical experience, having conducted locally and elsewhere, and he led a solid performance of this sprightly piece.

For the rest of the program, he turned the baton over to Cortese and took the role of narrator, delivering introductions to each of the pieces that followed, adding background that put each piece into context.

The Eugene Concert Choir assisted in the next work, a "Regina Coeli," K. 127 from 1772, when Mozart was 16 years old. Besides some choruses, the piece has elaborate soprano solos, which were sung by Lauren Flanigan, a well-established soloist who has appeared in concert and opera around the world.

This "Regina Coeli" may not be among Mozart's greatest works, but it is enjoyable music and a good example of how early his talents ripened. Like much church music of its time and place, it has a strongly operatic flavor, especially in the soprano solos.

Flanigan delivered these beautifully, negotiating the florid passage work in this piece with precision and assurance. It was a performance to savor. The Concert Choir's role was limited by comparison, but they sang very well. The orchestra was an accompaniment, and a very fine one. Cortese pulled the entire piece together admirably, with well chosen tempos and sensitive collaboration with Flanigan.

After this early piece, we jumped ahead to Mozart's final year with one of his last completed works, the Clarinet Concerto. It is brilliantly written for the soloist, but it also has what some call an autumnal character, almost as if Mozart knew that his time on Earth was growing short. Whether or not one accepts this interpretation of the music, the concerto is one of Mozart's finest in a genre in which he excelled.

The soloist was David Krakauer, a noted clarinetist who has worked extensively with contemporary composers and klezmer music as well as the standard repertory.

He gave a stunning performance of the Mozart Concerto. His tone is perhaps reedier than some, but that was in no way a defect. It reinforced the urgency he brought to the music, an urgency that could seem almost to go over the top, but which was always under careful control. He managed the technical challenges with ease, and almost danced along with the music in the finale.

Cortese and the orchestra accompanied beautifully. Their role was much more than a mere accompaniment, though. It was a collaboration. The performance was outstanding.

The same is true of the following piece, "Exsultate, Jubilate," a motet for soprano solo and orchestra.

Flanigan's performance of this work was even more remarkable than her earlier appearance. The famous "Alleluia" finale is often sung separately, and its elaborate coloratura passages are the climax to a stunning display piece.

Flanigan's rendition of the entire composition was exemplary. It brought the first half of the generous program to a rousing close.

After intermission, the orchestra had the stage to itself as Cortese led them in the Symphony in C major, K. 551, the "Jupiter," Mozart's last symphony.

It is on the whole a joyful work, containing much of the pomp and circumstance that were associated with the key of C in Mozart's time. It also includes some of the most elaborate counterpoint Mozart or anyone else ever wrote, especially in the finale.

Cortese led a performance that was both straightforward and affectionate. It moved along at a brisk pace that did not preclude subtlety in the musical phrasing and punctuation.

The balances were always good within the orchestra, so that important passages in any instrument could always be heard. In all, it was one of the orchestra's best performances ever.

To conclude the evening, 11 singers from the University of Oregon Opera Ensemble lined up on the front of the stage and performed the final scene from "The Marriage of Figaro." The young performers gave a fine account of themselves in a salute to Mozart's prowess as a composer of operas.

The Oregon Mozart Players have never sounded better than they did on this special occasion.

Under Cortese's skilled leadership, they and their distinguished guests earned repeated enthusiastic ovations from what appeared to be a nearly full house. Mozart could not have received a greater tribute.

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