

# Review



**SYMPHONY  
REVIEW**

**Marin Symphony**

**Orion Weiss**

**Alasdair Neale**

**January 28, 2007**



**Orion Weiss**

## **The Bell Curve**

**By Mark Alburger**

Steve Reich used to say something to the effect that his interest in early music was keen, then tended to slack with regard to the Baroque, reached a nadir in the Classical era, and zoomed up again during the time of Stravinsky and beyond. In the late 20th century, many composers in musical academia would have agreed with this general sentiment, including (to an extent) me.

So it was a surprise that Mozart was the big hit at the Marin Symphony on Sunday evening — Mozart, that epitome of order and perfection, who could be found wanting when compared to Haydn, saved by his humor, or Beethoven, saved by his power, both of them saved by their occasional, restless unpredictability.

More than 200 years after Mozart penned his Symphony No. 35 in D Major, K.385, ("Haffner"), the work continues to move listeners with its consummate balance of stasis and change, its canny use of obvious devices for nonobvious ends, and clearly argued yet ingeniously original deployment of material and form. Music Director Alasdair Neale made it all happen with an orchestra that has decidedly improved over the years. Even in the reduced forces of a late 18th century work, the strings worked at a high level, and winds blended in understated ways that were welcome after past indiscretions. From the resounding introduction, through the dignities and confidences of the interior movements, to the fevered finale, this was a top-notch, mainstream performance.

## **Climacti interrupti**

The concert opened with a Magnum Opus-commissioned work by



**Alasdair Neale**



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Peteris Vasks, titled *Sala, Symphonic Elegy for Orchestra* (2006), in its world premiere. As the Latvian composer notes in the program, " 'Sala' ... means island. Every single person is actually an island and this island is a source of sadness as well as of energy power and also of dramaticism. So, everybody is an island and the story [of the *Symphonic Elegy*] is about it, told from my own island. ... Every listener should seek their own island and experience their own symphonic elegy."

Nice sentiments (through the scrim of English as a second language), although *Magnum Opus* — a joint project of the Marin, Santa Rosa, and Oakland East Bay symphonies — has not exactly been knocking at most of our doors to write elegies. This one is a solid, 20-minute single movement, long on solemnity and beauty, and short on rhythm, humor, and energy. It was persuasively realized, in gorgeous, bell-tone effects that evoked at once the spiritual world of Eastern European postminimalism and Shostakovich's desolate Russian secularism (the xylophones helped by doubling strings à la the second movement of the latter's *Symphony No. 5*).

A measured chorale of three trombones popped up on several occasions, and we heard no fewer than three climacti interrupti, broken off just at the point of resolution into more diffuse, Ivesian textures. After the fireworks came sinuous, rambling melodies from the English horn and clarinet — definitely an island with respect to our hustle-bustle contemporary world. We heard a retreat, but perhaps a confrontation and an antidote, too. In any case, the music was warmly received, and it garnered a standing ovation.

Kudos were also due to Orion Weiss for his resolute performance of Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 3*, which has been rising on the popularity charts recently, thanks to media connections. While less tuneful than other of the composer's works, this piece is not without its late-late-late-Romantic retro charms, to which Weiss and company gave their all. Still, it was not hard to let the mind wander back to Mozart and those crisp, rhythmic lines, cutting through the stew of emotions fore and aft.

(Mark Alburger is an award-winning ASCAP composer of concert music published by New Music, editor-publisher of *21st-Century Music Journal*, oboist, pianist, vocalist, and music critic.)

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