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Arts

'Joy' marks theme of 2nd DPO concert of season

Burt Saidel



Beethoven's Ninth, the Choral Symphony, has become a worldwide musical icon. I understand that it is the pop feature of concerts in Japan to welcome the New Year. It customarily ends the season of an orchestra.

Maestro Neal Gittleman and the Dayton Philharmonic don't follow prosaic rules. The second classical concert of this season featured The Ninth. I can assure you that it was not a Tokyo New Year's celebration. It was also not a harbinger of spring.

Maestro Neal's innovation continues. Customarily, The Ninth is an entire program. If there is a curtain riser, it is short and serves to get the air circulating through the hall and the pipes of the wind instruments.

The mold was broken - let me tell you more about this wonderful concert. To a nearly full house, Gittleman ushered out the residency of Tchaikovsky by playing his Coronation March. A complete *tutti* romp, the superb acoustics of the Schuster and the artists of the orchestra passed the test. Blood was pumping!

This was followed by a first hearing for many of us. Igor Stravinsky loved the music of Tchaikovsky. As Neal described, he rummaged through some obscure works of the master, added his own new century, new music slant, and came up with a ballet, *The Fairy's Kiss*.

The work became a romp through everyone's musical memory closet. Each section had a star role and the entire ensemble played with élan and joy.

What more could you ask? Beethoven's Ninth!

Set to Schiller's great poem, *An Freude*, The Ninth is the "ode to joy" which the composer dreamed. It has given the world a ray of hope and happiness, even in the bleakest times.

That joy was radiating throughout the hall as the orchestra, according to Beethoven's script, examined the ideal way of expressing man's

longing for and need for joy. By the fourth, the choral movement, the secret was out. It was adding the human voice, *die Stimme*, to grant that boon.

The Dayton Philharmonic Chorus under Professor Hank Dahlman literally lived those words, that joy. The four soloists, Dayton Opera stars Mary Wilson and Chad Johnson (Chad is singing the lead, Alfredo, in the coming Dayton Opera, *La Traviata*) were joined by mezzo Susan Platts and Dayton's own baritone John Shuffle.

The result was unforgettable and much needed joy. Musical perfection, great artistry, took that often elusive leap into personal and collective joy! We are so fortunate and so filled with gratitude.

WSU's Proof

Wright State's opening production, David Auburn's *Proof*, garnered the memory of my first experience with the play. The Human Race mounted this cerebral drama in 2003. I was impressed that the subject of higher mathematics could be its focus.

Very well acted, it paled before another play dealing with an academic subject, *Wit*, also by the Human Race in 2000. Both plays deal with death and an overriding academic concentration. One was mathematics, the other poetry.

As I contrasted the two plays in my mind, an important connection was manifest. In *Wit*, one of the two pivotal characters in this unforgettable drama was Wright State's Professor Mary Donahoe. As the relentless academic, she brought focus to her dying colleague's actual dying and the literary dying as described in John Donne's great poem, "Death be not Proud."

As the director of WSU's *Proof*, I knew she could raise the experience from a good but wordy play to another dramatic triumph. I was so correct!

At WSU, the audience was greeted by a mesmerizing set. The stage became an old house, still dignified and tree-surrounded, but showing age and even an elegant decay. Designed by Pam Knauert-Lavarnway and executed under Tim Judge's direction entirely by students, it proved why WSU theater arts students are so

successful in the professional world which awaits them.

From the first words of dialogue, the actors made their characters shine with reality well mixed with theatrical fantasy. The play became a real drama full of the magic only live theater can bring.

Describing the actors is more important than outlining the complex plot. It was evident that these four gifted senior students were standing at the gateway of their chosen art with gifts from teachers such as Mary Donahoe. Normally, I extol the special exuberance of WSU's youth. But beyond the appeal of youth and beauty, there was real acting, real theatrical communication.

Zachary Brown, also a singer and dancer, and Amy Geist made their critical supporting roles as strong as bridge abutments. As the protagonists, Cameron Hansel and Valerie Gerlock used their physical beauty and talent to give the audience a true understanding of their characters. Valerie became more beautiful with each scene. Her magnificent hair was almost distracting.

Mary Donahoe's special touches were clear. Music transitioned each scene, darkness and extended pauses added suspense. There were surprises which, on realization, were not surprises but were subtly indicated in the action. This was true theater. Please do not miss such an opportunity. The play continues through October 11th.

The Springfield Symphony

The Springfield Symphony under Maestro Peter Stafford Wilson received a gift. Their new podium was made by the "God Squad" so feted in these pages. As protagonist of the "God Squad" I received a gift by hearing a rehearsal of their opening concert at Tuss Auditorium.

Featured was the second piano concerto of Lowell Liebermann. Played by Christopher Durrenberger, we discovered a most riveting work, performed by fine musicians. The concert was heard on October 3rd.

Remarkably, this fine orchestra features an American work of new music at each of its six concerts. How exciting!

Next month, our Philharmonic will play Liebermann's Clarinet Concerto. I can't wait!

Dali-Disney collaboration on view at DAI

Opening this week at the Dayton Art Institute is the exhibition *Dali and Disney: The Art and Animation of Destino*, on view Oct. 10 through Jan. 3, 2010. In 1946, Salvador Dali began a collaboration with Walt Disney Studios on a short animated film called *Destino*. After eight months - during which Dali produced paintings, pen-and-ink drawings and storyboards - Disney abandoned the project. In 1999, Roy

Disney resurrected *Destino* from the Disney vaults and completed the film. *Dali and Disney: The Art and Animation of Destino* will display prints of the art Dali created for the film, and visitors will be able to view the completed animated short. This exhibition, organized by The Dayton Art Institute and on loan from the collection of Dr. Lawrence and Holley Thompson, is free and open to the public during regular museum

hours. *Dali and Disney: The Art and Animation of Destino* is sponsored by Freund, Freeze & Arnold.

For more information about these exhibitions and related programs at The Dayton Art Institute, please visit www.daytonartinstitute.org or call the museum at 937-223-5277. Be sure to also visit The Dayton Art Institute on Facebook and Twitter for additional information and exclusive offers.