

News | Central Vermont

Music Review: Vermont Youth Orchestra aces premiere

May 9, 2012



BURLINGTON – Despite the turmoil of three music directors and two executive directors in two years, the Vermont Youth Orchestra Association remains one of Vermont’s musical and educational gems. That was made clear, Sunday at the Flynn Center, when the Vermont Youth Orchestra and Chorus successfully delivered the world premiere of a large-scale work.

Robert Paterson’s “A New Eearth,” for narrator, chorus and orchestra, proved a grand statement about the dangers of climate change. With a text based on Bill McKibben’s book of the same title, plus classic poetry, the 30-minute work decries the current situation yet offers hope.

While the message was predictable – preaching to the choir in Vermont – Paterson’s music was anything but. Ranging from clashing atonal to serenely tonal, the score employed myriad musical effects – including a substantial percussion section – that illustrated the libretto. More than that, with the chorus, it was an amazingly colorful tone poem.

Conversely, the work was a bit long and overplayed the message. Still the music was beautifully crafted, ranging from Copland in style to blockbuster film, with even a touch of cutting-edge classical. There was immense power in parts, pathos in others. While the narration made it timely, the music itself would likely have held its own.

The VYO and Chorus clearly enjoyed every second of it, performing with passion and skill. Jeffrey Domoto, music director since February 2011, conducted the performance with skill and sensitivity. McKibben, currently scholar-in-residence at Middlebury College, delivered the narration with authority.

This completes a three-year residency for Paterson, a New York composer and percussionist who was once a member of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. During the residency, he not only assisted the students with his music, he mentored those composing their own.

Liam John, an Essex High School senior, proved himself an able player in the Adagio: Moderato from Elgar’s E Minor Cello Concerto. Despite a little stiffness, he played with real presence and passion.

Justin Truell, a senior at Mid-Vermont Christian School, also despite a little stiffness, proved quite a competent conductor, sensitive and nuanced, in Copland’s “John Henry: A Railroad Ballad for Orchestra.” Besides his role as VYO apprentice conductor, Truell has been a violinist in the orchestra and a baritone in the chorus.

Domoto also conducted the VYO in works by Dvorak and Holst. It is important to note that the VYOA, which serves some 500 kids from all over Vermont, as well as New York and New Hampshire, offers myriad programs for a broad spectrum of ages and levels.

If Sunday’s concert was any indication, the Vermont Youth Orchestra Association is in fine fettle.