

## *From Vienna to St. Louis*

Last Sunday evening I was invited to review the concert presented by the Metropolitan Orchestra of St. Louis. I invited a couple of friends to accompany me. Both were halting in their acceptance, due to pressing matters in other directions, and one in particular just wasn't sure he was ready for me to drag him to yet another musical event.

But...once the program opened with Allen Carl Larson, Conductor Laureate, leading the orchestra in a performance of the lushly beautiful Adagietto from Gustav Mahler's (1860-1911) Symphony No. 5, that friend was completely hooked into the program. Why? Because he realized that this would be a program of substance, not designed to impress critics but to speak to the listening audience who are often unappreciated by performing organizations, but who make up the backbone of support for performing organizations.

The Metropolitan Orchestra is a grassroots ensemble that fills a niche in a city that knows no shortage of performing organizations, yet the capacity crowd demonstrated that that niche exists. People are hungry for substance and meaning in art, but they also hunger for deeper knowledge and understanding of what they see and hear. Too often, modern day symphony orchestras are quick to force grant-driven avant-garde works upon audiences without first making sure they comprehend the basic language of musical structures. MOSL is one of many newer ensembles springing up to provide both an educational and esthetic experience. In some cases these ensembles are completely amateur, and in some cases they are a combination of professionals and amateurs, and in some cases they are fully professional--the category to which MOSL trends--but they are all making an impact on the cultural landscape.

Until our elementary and secondary schools can provide a more complete education in the arts (and no, it's not just a matter of money), institutions such as MOSL are introducing multi-generational audiences to our vast artistic heritage.

MOSL was joined by the Concert Choir of Webster University for a performance of Mozart's (1756-1791) famous motet, "Ave Verum", followed by the Mass No. 11 in D Minor, the "Nelson Mass" (named in honor of the visit of Lord Nelson to Vienna following his defeat of Napoleon) by Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809). The Choir, under the direction of Trent A. Patterson, is an outstanding chorus, without doubt one of the finest in the country. They performed with a magnificent blend, firmly on pitch and with careful diction and well-sculpted phrasing. Soloists in the Mass--soprano Heather McKenzie Patterson, mezzo Martha J. Hart, tenor Keith Boyer and bass Jeffrey Heyl--matched the Concert Choir's skill, negotiating Haydn's rapid-fire passages with gusto, verve and energy.

A common bond among all three featured composers on the program is the fact that all three had lived and worked in Vienna for at least a certain period of their lives. Together, they spanned an era of music history stretching from 1732 to 1911.

Allen Larson has never been one to rest on his laurels, and the Metropolitan Orchestra is only the latest jewel in his distinguished career. MOSL is fortunate to have a permanent and acoustically adequate home at the First Presbyterian Church in Kirkwood, Missouri--and can even boast of ample and free parking, which should not be underestimated for serious concertgoers. The St. Louis community is blessed to have such an institution in our midst.

Posted by Gary Scott  
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