

SomerTones to Present Free Holiday Concert

FANWOOD – The Fanwood Arts Council will present a free performance of holiday singing by The SomerTones on Sunday, December 3, at 2 p.m. at the Patricia M. Kuran Cultural Arts Center. All are invited to attend.

The SomerTones sing four-part a cappella music in the barbershop style. Based in Somerville, the chorus and its quartets perform at corporate and charitable functions, private parties, concerts and community events.

The group's family program will include a selection of winter holiday songs such as "Jingle Bells," "Deck the Halls," "Winter Wonderland" and "Let It Snow," among many others.

Founded in 1949 as a chapter of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America, the chorus was formerly known as The Hounds for Harmony. It became The SomerTones in 2000 and was crowned the Mid-Atlantic District Northern Division Small Chorus Champions in 2001.

The Patricia M. Kuran Cultural Arts Center is located on Watson Road in Fanwood, adjacent to Fanwood Borough Hall. For more information about the concert, call (908) 889-7223 or (908) 889-5298.

Carriage House Poetry Series Celebrates 8th Anniversary

FANWOOD – The Carriage House Poetry Series invites the public to attend a free poetry reading on Thursday, December 7, at 8 p.m. in the Kuran Arts Center on Watson Road, off North Martine Avenue, adjacent to Fanwood Borough Hall. The featured readers will be distinguished poets Renée Ashley and Peter Murphy.

Ms. Ashley is the author of four volumes of poetry: "Salf" (which won the Brittingham Prize in Poetry), "The Revisionist's Dream" and a chapbook, "The Museum of Lost Wings," as well as a novel, "Someplace Like This." She received fellowships from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. Ashley is a contributing editor to *The Literary Review*, and she is on the faculty of Fairleigh Dickinson University's low-residency Master of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing.

Mr. Murphy was born in Wales and grew up in New York City, where he operated heavy equipment, managed a nightclub and drove a cab. "Stubborn Child," his first book, was a finalist for the 2006 Paterson Poetry Prize. He received awards and fellowships from

Arts & Entertainment

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra Brings Beethoven's Sixth to Life

By VICTORIA McCABE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

NEWARK – This Beethoven purist dreams of attending a repeat of the Sixth Symphony's premiere performance – the December 22, 1808 concert that presented the Fifth and Sixth symphonies as a pair.

That the two wildly different works were conceived at the same time, dedicated to the same individuals and performed side-by-side often surprises people. Beethoven's Fifth is the work most would argue embodies the composer's revered heroic style – a musical epic, it poses intense dramatic problems that do not find real resolution until the finale. The Sixth, the "Pastoral" Symphony, is more about painting scenes than telling a story – it is a largely unproblematic ode to the natural beauty of the world. The Fifth is rife with conflict and triumph; the only discord in the Sixth

comes out of programmatic necessity in the movement entitled "Thunderstorm" (movements like "Awakening of joyous feelings upon arriving in the country" don't really leave themselves open for uncertainty or drama).

And yet each symphony strengthens the other. Most people think of Beethoven and the intense dramatic rhetoric of the Fifth and imagine a tortured soul. But taken together, the Fifth and the Sixth show a man of

opportunity to hear the lyrical Beethoven and then hear Wagner's romanticism, so inspired by Beethoven, was wonderful.

From the very first notes, the Sixth was exquisite. To say that hearing a classical work live is infinitely better than listening to a recording is certainly unnecessary, but the way that the robust string section immediately filled NJPAC's Prudential Hall with Beethoven's delicate melody was



'PASTORAL' PERFORMANCE...The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra brought Beethoven's Sixth Symphony to life at NJPAC.

many dimensions, a composer who perhaps meant to indicate that the reason all the intense drama and heroicism and doubt were worth the struggle was because afterwards, one could more profoundly appreciate the world's beauty.

But, for the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra's Beethoven series, the composer's nine symphonies are, understandably, spread out over this year's full concert season. So the Fifth and Sixth have been separated, as they most often are. And the orchestra must pay attention to other composers as well, so the choice to include works from Mozart and Wagner on this concert was not surprising.

So there was no Beethovenian struggle at NJPAC two weekends ago, only his picturesque revelry in nature. Not that that was really a problem, especially since the NJSO breathed such life into the Sixth Symphony. And though the audience missed out on the chance to experience multiple facets of the composer's complex personality in tandem, the

breath-taking.

The Sixth is an amazing symphony for strings; Beethoven calls on their special timbre to wrap around his nature-evoking themes. And the first movement unfolded majestically in the NJSO string players' hands, passionately playing anchored by the cellos and basses.

The orchestra was slightly out of synch at certain climaxes; guest conductor Gerard Schwarz didn't always appear to communicate clearly with the musicians, who are used to the trusting, intuitive baton of Neeme Järvi. But some truly brilliant performances from orchestra members, especially the principal wind soloists, kept the focus on the magnificent beauty of the symphony.

In the second movement, "Scene by the brook," the orchestra painted the serene scene that Beethoven draws with music, and the flautist and oboist floated lovely melodies over a string texture. And after vigorously opening the third movement, "Happy

WF Symphony Concert Runs Emotional Gamut

By BRAD TINFOW
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD—On November 18, the Westfield Symphony Orchestra (WSO), under the baton of Music Director David Wroe, continued the season's Far East theme with a concert entitled "Songs of the Orient."

The only two works on the program were *Das Lied von der Erde* (The Song of the Earth) and *Symphony No. 8 in F Major, Op. 93* by Beethoven. The Mahler piece, set to German translations of Chinese poems, fit within the premise of the concert's title, while the unrelated Beethoven symphony offered a welcome relief from the profundity addressed in the first half of the program.

As written, *Das Lied* features six movements that alternate between tenor and mezzo-soprano soloists, in this case, the veteran Jon Garrison and relative newcomer Laura Vlasak Nolen.

As Maestro Wroe explained after intermission, due to limited rehearsal time, he did not include the usual fifth movement, "Der Trunkene im Frühling" (The Drunken Man in Spring) in an effort to better prepare the five remaining movements. This was unfortunate for the audience, which missed a more lighthearted setup for the final "Der Abschied" (The Farewell) and another opportunity to hear the tenor.

Except for the usual balance problems due to the physical elevation of the woodwinds and brass, which tended to overshadow the singers during louder sections, the WSO executed very well.

Mahler's orchestration creates many occasions for individual players to shine in solo or small ensemble. These exposed passages were beautifully done, and Maestro Wroe persuaded each deserving instrumentalist to stand up for individual accolades.

The vocalists were both strong. Mr. Garrison has enjoyed a distinguished 35-year career. His publicity photo in the program portrayed a man 20 years younger than the one the audience saw, but the now-grey-haired tenor still cut a dashing figure on stage. He sang with the vigor of a young man, with a solid technique and expressivity that demonstrated an acute awareness of the subtleties of the text.

I would venture there is little doubt that Ms. Nolen, who made her professional debut only three years ago, will have a major career. Her voice was astonishing in its size, resonance and beauty.

One expected to hear an imperfection, such as strain in her highest

register, a thinning at the low end or at least a note that was less than irresistibly lush; but no such flaw surfaced. Her instrument sounded so natural and organically produced that there was never a hint of overexertion, even on the high G's, which almost literally shook the rafters. Her interpretation also captured the spirit of the German text.

Even though Beethoven's *Symphony No. 8* is dwarfed by the two great ones on either side of it, it charms with a host of musical surprises. For example, the second theme in the exposition of the first movement, which would usually be in C major, is first stated in D major, where it sounds lost, before slipping into the expected key eight bars later.

Instead of settling there, it modulates further, lingering on the limbo of a diminished chord before firmly establishing the secondary key of C major in the closing theme.

The recapitulation begins unexpectedly, with different orchestration than the exposition. Here, the cellos and basses carry the principal theme, with the violins and violas playing sustained chords above them. The arrangement of parts is completely altered throughout, all the way to the secondary theme.

The second movement *Allegretto Scherzando* is a charming trifle, a far cry from the emotionally heavy contrast one has come to expect from the great composer. As Mr. Wroe remarked after the intermission, the symphony is unusual in its lack of a real slow movement.

The third movement *Minuet* is almost a throwback to an earlier period. The *Trio* is literally that, with two horns and a clarinet carrying the bulk of the melodic material. If not for some interesting chord progressions in the beginning of the second section of the trio, one would not ascribe the movement to the mature Beethoven.

The rapid fourth movement uses an emphatic "wrong note" C sharp (totally out of place in the key of F major), at the end of each statement of the principal theme, which is an amusing shock to the listener. Similar to what he does in the first movement, Beethoven begins the secondary theme in the foreign key of A flat major, except this time set up as a deceptive cadence (the listener strongly expects a C major chord, and gets something else).

There are other examples of merriment in this final movement, but space limits detailing them all. Suffice it to say that it revels in the joy of notes, and the result is delight for a discerning audience.

As with most of their performances

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