



Civic Orchestra of Tucson Program Notes for December 1 and 2, 2018

Back in the day, the term “contemporary,” when used to describe serious musical composition, was a pejorative. Even the broader use of “20th Century” when attached to orchestral literature implied such music was perhaps suspect, and to be avoided at all costs. “American music” was approached with cautious skepticism.

How dare they (Civic Orchestra of Tucson) present a program of all 20th century, all American music!

Happily, the term “contemporary” has evolved and morphed into a much more gentle connotation and in a generalized sense simply has come to mean music of our time-music that does not (necessarily) sound “modern” cacophonous, strident, or just downright unpleasant.

This weekend’s program features just such music.

Jubilee (1960) is a bright, sparkling demonstration of music from the middle part of the 20th century that is totally accessible to the eager ear. Take lots of brass and percussion, add a rich lyrical section for strings, throw in an energetic fugue, and culminate with a grand chorale all from the pen of a living American composer currently residing in Phoenix. What could be better?

Jubilee is scored for pairs of woodwinds, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, harp, timpani, lots of percussion, and strings.

Chiaroscuro (1984)

In the words of Wikipedia: “Chiaroscuro (Italian for *light-dark*), in art, is the use of strong contrasts between light and dark, usually bold contrasts affecting a whole composition. It is also a technical term used by artists and art historians for the use of contrasts of light to achieve a sense of volume in modeling three-dimensional objects and figures.”

Suffice it to say that this piece harkens back to earlier times and the use of “contemporary, modern, 20th century, and American.” [Additional commentary will be provided from the podium.]

Chiaroscuro is scored for flute/piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, one bassoon, two horns, one trumpet, timpani, xylophone, vibraphone, tubular bells, wind chimes, glockenspiel, and 4 tom-toms.

Four Dance Episodes from “Rodeo” (1946)

Agnes de Mille was commissioned by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo to choreograph a “cowboy” ballet and she reached out to Aaron Copland to create the musical score. His previous work, “Billy the Kid,” had been a major success and de Mille correctly assumed that Copland would again be up to the task. The 1942 premier at the (old) Metropolitan Opera House in NYC was a huge hit and a year later the four dance suite was debuted by the Boston Pops Orchestra with its exciting rhythms, lyrical melodies, and Southwest flavor. What’s not to like?

Symphony No. 2 , Opus 30 (“Romantic”) (1930)

“Howard Hanson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, and a conductor and pedagogue who directed the Eastman School of Music in Rochester for 40 years, died Thursday night.... He was 84 years old. Throughout his life, Dr. Hanson was a progressive educator whose special province was American music.” (New York Times, February 28, 1981)

Hanson was an American musical giant. From modest roots sent down by his Swedish parents in Wahoo, Nebraska, Howard’s early education sent him to the Luther School of Music and Wahoo High school, then to the Institute of

Musical Art in New York, after which he attended Northwestern University where he earned his degree at the age of nineteen.

With almost meteoric speed, Hanson transitioned through a faculty position at the College of the Pacific in San Jose, CA, to the position of Dean of the Conservatory of Fine Arts, then became the first fellow of the American Academy of Rome, where he studied and composed for three years. He then came to the attention of George Eastman, who had generously provided several million dollars for the establishment of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, and Hanson, age 28, was appointed its director.

Hanson composed his second symphony, one of his most frequently heard works, in 1930 on a commission from the Boston Symphony Orchestra to celebrate its 50th anniversary. Unlike a typical symphonic structure, it is in three movements rather than the traditional four.

Symphony No. 2 is scored for 3 flutes (piccolo), 3 oboes (English Horn), 2 clarinets, 3 bassoons (contra), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and the usual body of strings.

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