

Review: Dario Marianelli debuts 'Pride & Prejudice'

Spartanburg Philharmonic, conductor Ioannides ends season with 'Film Score Night'

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Every chef knows about the importance of planning your menu. You could offer your guests the most exquisite Peking Duck the world has ever known, but if you pair it with salmon mousse, chili cheese fries, and a three-olive martini, it's not going to go over real well.

So it is when musicians select pieces for a concert program. A poorly assembled program provides audiences with moments of beauty or excitement that somehow don't seem to add up to much; a well chosen one carries audiences from piece to piece smoothly, with each piece echoing the ideas of the last and the whole developing a cumulative power greater than the sum of its parts.

The Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra's concert Saturday night at Twichell Auditorium at Converse College provided a shining example of the latter. The event, which marked the fifth and final Masterworks concert of the season for the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra, was billed as "Film Score Night." Music director Sarah Ioannides led a program that paired two French pieces from the beginning of the last century with two English pieces from the beginning of this century – one of them a world premiere – to powerful effect. London-based composer Dario Marianelli was the orchestra's guest, acting as piano soloist in suites adapted from his scores to the films "Pride & Prejudice" and "Atonement"; Marianelli's evocative and eventually powerful pieces were illumined and amplified by the two well-known works that shared the bill, Maurice Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and Claude Debussy's *Clair de Lune*.

Ravel was first on the menu, the shimmering sheets of cascading 16th notes of its opening oboe solo played with liquescent gorgeousness by Kelly Vaneman. Ravel dedicated each of *Tombeau's* movements to the memory of a friend killed in World War I, and in its subtle way this elegiac, bittersweet work is an orchestral showpiece; the orchestra played it with a grace and limpid clarity of which any orchestra might be proud.



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Academy Award winning composer Dario Marianelli rehearses his "Pride & Prejudice Suite" with the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra Saturday morning in the Twichell Auditorium at Converse College. The orchestra is conducted by Sarah Ioannides.

Marianelli next joined the orchestra for the premiere of a suite adapted from his 2005 score for the film "Pride & Prejudice." Scoring a film places particular demands on a composer – he doesn't have to worry so much about sustaining tension over a long period of time, for instance (the story line, hopefully, takes care of that), but he does have to communicate mood and emotion pretty much instantaneously (a discipline not necessarily demanded of the composer of a symphony, for example). Marianelli has this skill in abundance, and his low-key presence at the keyboard served to direct the audience's focus to the wonderfully evocative music itself. The suite was unified by a pensive piano introduction, which recurred and was developed between orchestral episodes ranging in character from bucolic to impassioned. Ioannides and the composer-soloist displayed all the effortless communication one might expect from fine musicians who also happen to be old college friends and the orchestra responded sensitively, with some particularly fine English horn playing on offer.

Debussy's Clair de Lune opened the second half, its familiarity in no way diminishing the impact of its bittersweet, melancholy beauty; the orchestra's delicacy of phrasing here was remarkable, and the flute playing especially lovely.

Clair de Lune and its two predecessors worked perfectly to prime the audience for the impact of the concert's finale, the Atonement Suite. Marianelli won the Academy Award for his score for the 2007 film, and it made for an inventive concert piece and a deeply powerful listening experience. Here the longer and more-developed orchestral episodes were linked not by a solo but by recurring dialogue among the piano, a solo cello (played by the orchestra's principal, Kenneth Law), and, of all things, a Smith-Corona typewriter used as a sort of semi-pitched percussion instrument (played with theatrical aplomb by percussionist Matthew McDaniel). The piece's climax arrived in a striking coup de théâtre, as after much stormy darkness the orchestra began singing, first quietly then with increasing passion, the hymn "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind." The effect was stunning.

It also heightened the poignancy of the sad announcement that cellist Kenneth Law is leaving the orchestra and relocating to Washington, D.C. Cellists with his rich, burnished tone and expressive powers are hard to come by; cellists who have those things and the searching musical intelligence and unfailing integrity he brings to every performance are one in a million.

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