

Review: 'Fresh energy to canonic jewels'

Philharmonic displays community's talents

By LEAH HARRISON

For the Herald-Journal

Published: Monday, November 12, 2012 at 11:34 a.m.

Last Saturday, the preponderance of Spartanburg's musical talent and one remarkable New Yorker collaborated to bring fresh energy to canonic jewels.

In their second Masterworks concert of the season, the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra presented a program featuring clarinetist Anthony McGill on Nov. 10 in Twichell Auditorium. McGill is the principal clarinetist for the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra.

The overture to Mozart's *The Magic Flute* opened the evening with its three broad chords, often considered a symbolic mimic of three knocks at the Masonic temple door. The ensemble's excellent balance was apparent in the delicate melody that followed, giving way to contrapuntal precision.

Sarah Ioannides, now in her eighth year as SPO's music director, conducts with strength and great authority, clearly relying on a well-established relationship with her orchestra. SPO has matured commendably under her baton and it is a pleasure to hear musicians that know each other well.

Joining the orchestra for the remainder of the first half, McGill awed the audience with eloquent virtuosity. First, he played Rossini's *Introduction, Theme and Variations for Clarinet and Orchestra*, full of dazzling runs and seemingly effortless trysts from the highest to lowest registers of the instrument. McGill brought out Rossini's contrasting cheek and whimsy, baiting the audience and reliably nailing the timing of the punch lines.

McGill pushed the tempo throughout, which he later admitted during an on-stage interview, sometimes prioritizing flashiness over musicality. And though his agility paralleled that of an Olympian, never was he more impressive than in the opening phrase of Rossini's theme, a relaxed and amiable tune showcasing McGill's warm, melting tone.

Sans baton, Ioannides directed an arrangement of three Gershwin preludes, again featuring McGill. The soloist directed syncopated squeals and purrs at various cohorts on stage, bent notes oozing, through alternating boisterous and sultry moods. After a lengthy ovation, the musicians performed the final prelude again, at almost twice the speed.

In the second half, SPO played Schubert's familiar "Unfinished" symphony, taking a



Photo provided

In their second Masterworks concert of the season, the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra presented a program featuring clarinetist Anthony McGill on Nov. 10 in Twichell Auditorium. McGill is the principal clarinetist for the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra.

mild tempo that paid off in the heaviest, weighty phrases, but at other times sounded lethargic. Frayed entrances in the violins — a recurring problem throughout the evening — popped up occasionally in the symphony, though they quickly recovered. In both movements of this incomplete work, the ensemble did an admirable job keeping any unexpected harmonic turns a secret, successfully playing out the subtle surprise. And not to be outshone by the guest artist, principal clarinetist Karen Hill performed striking solos in this work and the Gershwin.

Borodin's Polovtsian Dances closed the evening, with the First Presbyterian Chancel Choir performing from the balcony. Following a mystical orchestral opening, the choir's crisp diction and firm grasp of the spirited piece made for a rousing rendition of the folk work. The choir, under the direction of Holt Andrews, provided professional-grade musicianship and blend; unfortunately, partially because of their positioning, the choir was sometimes covered by the instruments in the rowdiest parts of the piece.

In all, the evening displayed the community's enviable musical talents and great collaborative spirit.

Copyright © 2012 GoUpstate.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.