

Mozart shines in fest finale

Concert review

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Post music writer

Mozart, 250 years young, has been well-served by Mischa Santora and the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra this month.

The CCO's Mozart Mini-festival, which stepped into the breach left by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra when the CSO discontinued its June "Bach and Beyond" series in 2004, has served the community well, too, drawing appreciative crowds and offering an alternative to grand opera and al fresco events.

"Keyboard to Paradise," Sunday afternoon's Mozart Mini-fest finale at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music's Corbett Auditorium, spotlighted the Austrian master's piano music.

CCO music director Santora supplied pertinent and engaging commentary without talking down to the audience or taking too much knowledge for granted.

A chatty letter from Mozart to his father gave a human dimension to the concert, for example.

Guest artist Daniel Alfred Wachs was like icing on the torte. A conductor as well as a pianist - he was Santora's predecessor as assistant conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra and now serves in the same capacity with the Orchestre National de France - Wachs proved himself a formidable Mozartian in not one, but two of his piano concertos.

The Concerto No. 11 in F Major, K.413, and No. 9 in E-flat Major, K.271, ("Jeunehomme"), complemented each other neatly. No. 11, from Mozart's first Viennese period, is actually less venturesome than the more complex, personal No. 9 from his earlier placeCitySalzburg days.

The opening Allegro of No. 11 was light-footed to heavier and more dramatic, with brisk cantering up and down the keys and a bountiful cadenza dovetailed smoothly into the surrounding music.

The broken chord accompaniment of the Larghetto gave it a delightful naiveté, and Wachs created a bit of watercolor at one point by lingering over a chord and letting the pitches spread.

He put plenty of spit and polish in the "Jeunehomme" Allegro, pathos in the Andantino with its long, soulful lines.

There were esprit and character to burn in the finale, which was capped with an elegant little decrescendo just before the end.

Opener was Mozart's Adagio and Fugue, K.546, for strings (originally two pianos). It was Mozart gone for baroque, sounding more like Bach with its dramatic introduction and contrapuntal rigor.

Santora led with keen expression, calling for soft incisiveness with little or no vibrato.

The CCO season opens Oct. 15 in Memorial Hall with an all-Mendelssohn program led by Santora.

Information at (513) 723-1182 or visit www.cincychamberorch.com.