



Rogue Valley Symphony brings message of joy and hope

By Maureen Flanagan Battistella for Revels | Apr 19, 2018 12:00 AM



The final Masterworks concert in the 50th anniversary year of the Rogue Valley Symphony will be an extravagant assemblage of music, performance, poetry and song. It will be one of Martin Majkut's most ambitious and exalted productions in his eight years as the symphony's music director.

The symphony will perform the final work in the commissioned series of five, the world premiere of "How Can You Own the Sky: A Symphonic Poem Honoring Native Wisdom," written by Rogue Valley composer Ethan Gans-Morse. The evening also will include original poetry by Tiziana DellaRovere, featuring Brent Florendo and Dancing Spirit, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 and performances by 100 artists from the Southern Oregon Repertory Singers and Rogue Valley Chorale.

Concerts will be at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, April 20-21, in the Craterian Theater at the Collier Center for the Performing Arts, 23 S. Central Ave, Medford; and 3 p.m. Sunday, April 22, in the Grants Pass Performing Arts Center, 830 N.E. Ninth St., Grants Pass. There is no Ashland performance of this concert.

Symphony No. 9 is the most celebrated musical work of the 19th century and was Beethoven's last full symphony before his death in 1927. The symphony is considered the composer's greatest work and requires an immense orchestra.

Beethoven brought Friedrich Schiller's poem "Ode to Joy" into his Symphony No. 9 composition, and so unlike other works of the day, this composition has a vocal component that lends another dimension of appreciation. The Rogue Valley Symphony's production of Symphony No. 9 will showcase Rogue Valley Chorale members and Southern Oregon Repertory Singers with soloists Chloe Olivia Moore, soprano; Rebecca Ringle Kamarei, mezzo-soprano; Brian Thorsett, tenor; and Norman Garrett, baritone.

Beethoven's Ninth reflects a lifetime of musical composition. There are ebbs and flows as he positioned different combinations and arrangements in the work, each testing and seeking an expression of the ultimate and highest joy of man's existence.

"Ode to Joy" brings a message of hope and optimism, and so Beethoven's final symphony is a promise that the world's pain can be healed in jubilant music making.

There are literally hundreds of musical and vocal instruments to manage in this production, and Martin Majkut has been ready for the challenge. When he interviewed for his position with the Rogue Valley Symphony in November 2009, Majkut was already thinking ahead to this moment, the 50th anniversary of the symphony. He asked, "Was there ever a question that we would do this piece? Every milestone needs to be celebrated with Beethoven 9. This is its proper place."

The 2017-18 season was enriched with five contemporary commissioned works, the last of which will be performed as a prelude to Symphony No. 9.

Joelle Graves, the symphony's interim executive director, says that the

commissioned work series was an unintended narrative arc. “Each one seems to surpass the one before in a particular way, either artistically or musically,” she says. “Each has more depth and each has come to be bigger and bigger.”

Gans-Morse designed his work as an overture to Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 and is a collaboration between the composer, poet Tiziana DellaRovere and Brent Florendo of Southern Oregon University’s Native American Studies program.

“It was a very rich collaboration that was two years in the making,” Gans-Morse says. Florendo provided the spiritual center for the piece and DellaRovere researched the history to craft a structural framework and its poetic content. Gans-Morse developed the music that encompasses the performance.

“How Can You Own the Sky” tells the Native American story here in Southern Oregon in four movements, starting in pre-history, continuing to the Rogue Indian Wars and then Oregon’s Trail of Tears as the Takelma Tribe is removed from its historic lands. The ensemble group Dancing Spirit performs during the opening of the work, Florendo and his family singing, dancing and drumming evoking an earlier time and place.

“In the fourth movement, we come out of that trauma into what we’re creating as a new reconciliation and hope for the future,” explains Gans-Morse. The fourth movement recalls a higher spirituality and more global message of environmental protection and the Earth as home. The performance also acknowledges an enduring message of collaboration and mutual respect.

DellaRovere sees her work on “How Can You Own the Sky” as her own cultural expiation as she was born in Genoa, Italy, the home of Christopher Columbus. Columbus was the first European to impose the new world on the old, beginning the transformation of the Americas and its indigenous peoples. “For me this piece is to admit injustice and honor what Native people have to teach us about nature and the environment,” she says.

Gans-Morse notes that the piece progresses organically, and neither the Native American music nor the orchestra intrudes on each other’s sound space but come together in its conclusion.

There is an arc to the evening, a performance and musical narrative that is not to be missed. “We’re starting with the very local and then we are expanding that to the country and then to the environment,” Gans- Morse says. “Beethoven goes to the universe, the infinite, all of creation. I love that we start so intimate, so local and end the night with the power of joy and music.”

Tickets can be purchased online at rvsymphony.org or by phone at [541-708-6400](tel:541-708-6400) for all performances. Medford concert tickets can also be purchased through the Craterian Theater at craterian.org or [541- 779-3000](tel:541-779-3000).

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