

## Cleveland Chamber Symphony: a tribute to three composing greats (Sept. 15)

by Stephanie Manning



Last Sunday's Cleveland Chamber Symphony concert began with an encore and ended with a concerto, flipping the usual program order on its head. The result was quite refreshing, setting the tone for their September 15 program: "NEOSonicFall — Celebrating NEOhio Composers."

The performance in Baldwin Wallace's Gamble Auditorium lasted just over an hour, a pleasant surprise when many

orchestral programs often double that. And it would have been even shorter had the group not repeated Donald Erb's *Spatial Fanfare*. Clocking in at less than two minutes, the opening work was over in a flash — so conductor Steven Smith explained that the group would repeat it to help the audience soak it in.

The resulting encore was a rare opportunity to hear a piece twice in one night, made even more interesting by the work's visual component. Heads turned to watch the different brass players, who were sprinkled throughout the auditorium and onstage as per the composer's instruction.

Erb, who died in 2008, taught at the Cleveland Institute of Music for more than 40 years. One of the other composers celebrated that evening also spent four decades at one institution: Loris Chobanian, who taught at Baldwin Wallace. The brass musicians traded places backstage with the string section as the group assembled for Chobanian's *Legends for String Orchestra*.

This relatively straightforward piece — originally written for a youth ensemble — includes Chobanian's program notes, which describe the story of all four movements in

detail. The musicians embraced the work's fantastical nature, including the mischievous pizzicatos in "The Leprechauns" and the insistent trills in "Dance of the Hags." The viola section nicely filled out the rich harmonies of "The Mystic Breeze," and the whole group leaned into the big emotional swells of "The Wishing Well."

The only component missing from the evening was a person who should have been in the audience: composer H. Leslie Adams, who passed away in May. So while the world premiere of *Cityscape Lights* remained celebratory, it also doubled as a memorial to his achievements.

Originally Adams' *Concerto for Piano*, which the composer reworked multiple times throughout his life, *Cityscape Lights* is the most recent version, edited by Mark Thome. The continued tweaks and fixes definitely speak towards Adams' love for the piece — each section feels carefully considered, with something new to add.

Playful chimes and luscious strings pervade the opening "Allegro ritmico," and the mallet percussion adds a sparkling melodic layer in the third movement "Allegro." Adams' attention to detail with the woodwind and brass parts was a highlight, including solos from English horn and tuba. The latter filled up the entire auditorium.

Soloist Mark George gave a graceful performance from the piano, complementing the orchestral texture. The transitions in and out of his solo cadenzas felt a touch disconnected, but the lush interplay between pianist and ensemble was often breathtaking.

Adams surely would have been pleased to hear his work given such a high-quality performance. Hopefully this is not the last time that Cleveland area audiences will hear *Cityscape Lights*.

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