

# Classical music review

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The San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra continues to prove itself to be more than a fine professional orchestra. Under the leadership of conductor Carlo Ponti, the staff and volunteers, it has become a gem for the community. At its Sunday afternoon concert, the orchestra and Ponti showcased orchestral sections, diverse and worthy music and outstanding performers. The event also served as a teaching tool for the young people in the audience.

The orchestra opened the concert with a pleasant medley of three songs by the late Michael Jackson, long-time friend of conductor Ponti, and followed with a work by Carlos Chavez for six percussions.

This was not a typical drum line. After each percussionist introduced himself and explained his particular array of instruments, the musicians took the audience on an intriguing exploration of rhythm's power to captivate the listener.

With almost no tonality, the piece told a story as compelling as any told by a tune, mystical, alluring, with many textures, and never boring, and obviously a real and nicely handled counting challenge for the musicians.

Ralph Vaughan-Williams' "Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis" featured strings only. Ten years ago, this piece would have severely challenged the string section, but not now. This orchestra's performance illuminated Vaughan-Williams' wonderful magical modulations, which seem to open up like the sun bursting through dark clouds. The performers delivered super-soft to lushly-big dynamics, with a precise weaving of the lines from section to section. Most appealing were the solos of principals Todor Pelev, Thomas Michael Sender, John Wang, and Joe Mendes, all of whom played with marvelous technique and artistry.

Ponti had arranged the sections in the European manner, and had assigned the back seats in the each section as the second orchestra. This provided an intriguing visual treat, and the excellence of all the musicians reminded us of the orchestra's wonderful depth.

After the third lumpy-but-necessary change of chairs and instruments, the orchestra came back to the stage and pianist Eldred Marshall, a graduate of Rialto's Eisenhower High School, delivered a capable performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 9. Matching the orchestra's perky, tidy approach, Marshall played with expression, sharp contrasts and attention to detail, all with a technique that developed more lightness as the piece progressed and reflected Mozart's playfulness. The achingly beautiful slow Andantino allowed for an exquisite interaction between piano and first violins, but the piano just would not sing for Marshall.

Marshall exploded into the Rondo/Presto movement, setting a pace even he couldn't keep up with. However, in spite of serious train wrecks on the descending runs in particular, he delivered a dazzling show of virtuosity.