Santa Barbara Symphony

GOT RHYTHM?

Review by Daniel Kepl / CASA

ONE OF THE FRESHEST SANTA BARBARA SYMPHONY PROGRAMS this season filled the Granada Theatre with energy during last weekend's Saturday night performance. The house was nearly full for Darius Milhaud's La creation du monde, written for 1920s jazz orchestra, followed by Aaron Copland's Clarinet Concerto, which uses only strings and harp as backup, but is also infused with jazz. After intermission, Beethoven's eternally exciting Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92 brought the evening to a delightfully rhythmic close. Conductor Nir Kabaretti's program order rose in excitement like a thermostat: cool jazz, hot jazz, and finally Beethoven's older but far from decrepit rhythmic energy. Carolyn Chrisman's animation film of impressions of Milhaud's Creation ran into some glitches Saturday, the large screen above the musicians going occasionally dark. No matter. The bits that did play for the audience were wonderfully evocative of the cool 1920s Parisian jazz of Milhaud's ballet music on African creation myths. It was also fun to watch Kabaretti conduct the spiffy little dance orchestra of about 16 players consisting of brass, winds including sax, string quartet, and a very busy percussionist.

Santa Barbara Symphony Principal Clarinet Don Foster wove delicate garlands of sound in the beautiful first part of Copland's Clarinet Concerto, a pas de deux as Copland himself described the section, between the clarinet and strings. In the thrilling and virtuosic fast section of the work, Copland calls out all the jazz riffs that Benny Goodman, for whom the concerto was composed, made famous: a tour de jazz, and some pretty tough jazz at that.

Kabaretti, Foster, and the orchestra sparkled. Richard Wagner referred to Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 as "the apotheosis of dance," and that was exactly Kabaretti's point as he conducted from memory a spirited and hair-raising performance. Even the elegiac slow movement pulsed unforgottably in Kabaretti's hands. The remaining three movements danced with energy. Kudos to horns in the last two, their famous calls championing a fabulous performance by all.

Meet the Musicians!

A RECEPTION FOR CLARINET SOLOIST DONALD FOSTER was held in the banquet room on the balcony level of the Granada Theatre following Saturday's Santa Barbara Symphony concert. Guests included patrons, members of the orchestra, Symphony board and staff members. Hors d'oeuvres and wines were served as Symphony Executive Director David Grossman thanked concert sponsors and introduced Music and Artistic Director Nir Kabaretti. The maestro praised the orchestra for a first-class performance of music by Milhaud (La creation du monde) and Beethoven (Symphony No. 7), but reserved special commendation for Mr. Foster, who has been Principal Clarinet of the Santa Barbara Symphony for 15 years, and had been the featured soloist in a jazz-filled performance of Aaron Copland's Clarinet Concerto earlier in the evening. Mr. Foster thanked both his orchestra colleagues and Maestro Kabaretti for supporting him so admirably in the performance.