

A Romantic Evening with the LSO

I had the pleasure of attending the LaGrange Symphony Orchestra's latest concert, **A Romantic Evening**, on November 6, 2007. This concert, conducted by Maestro Patricio Cobos, Music Director of LSO since 2001, featured baritone Andre Chiang, winner of the 2007 LSO Young Artists Competition. Cobos has taken LSO to new heights of excellence this season, as he has consistently done since taking the helm of this musical vessel six years ago.

LSO began the concert with Franz Lehar's **Merry Widow Overture**, composed in 1940. The work is comprised of numerous contrasting sections, riddled with abrupt changes in dynamics, tempo, and meter. In many musical ensembles, transitions between such sections create problems, as sixty individuals attempt to "apply the brakes" or to accelerate as one. However, transitions did not create a problem for LSO under the baton of Cobos. The orchestra moved from sweeping melodies to waltz-like passages to march-like sections without flaw. During the piece, the flutes, oboes, and harp were the shining stars, supported by a cast of strings, brass, and percussion.

Andre Chiang then took center stage, presenting several songs and arias. The young baritone began his portion of the concert with **Long Time Ago**, from a collection of songs written by American composer Aaron Copland. In typical Copland style, the piece is written in the simplest of terms. The woodwinds and strings tossed about melodies and countermelodies in a thin orchestration while Chiang performed the text and flowing melody. At times, Chiang's voice seemed to be covered by the orchestra, and I suspect that Callaway Auditorium, an excellent hall for instrumental performances, may have contributed to this problem. Next, Chiang performed **Come Paride Vezzoso**, an aria from Gaetano Donizetti's opera, **The Elixir of Love**. Confidence radiated from Chiang as he performed this aria, playing the part of a pompous soldier who is attempting to win the hand of a beautiful woman by telling her how wonderful he is. Chiang seemed to generate more resonance and power during this piece, balancing the orchestra more successfully. Chiang then performed the well-known aria **Madamina, il catalogo e questo** from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's **Don Giovanni**. Again, the orchestra excelled, performing instrumental gymnastics without error, but occasionally overpowering Chiang's voice during quiet passages. Chiang ended his segment of the concert with **It is Enough** from Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio, **Elijah**. Chiang's voice was filled with longing, supported by dark passages performed by the strings. The cellos joined in with Chiang in a call and answer as the piece built to a furious tempo and then slowly died away, ending the piece.

After a brief intermission, LSO returned to the stage with Mendelssohn's **Symphony No. 3 in a minor, Op. 56, "Scottish."** Throughout the four movement masterpiece, each and every instrument has a chance to shine as the orchestra moves through intense, fiery passages and beautiful, fluid melodies. It is the French horns who become the true celebrities of the piece, however, performing with immense passion and providing the solid backbone of the work. However, lots of "team playing" from all sections made the piece a true success.

I have followed the musical journey of the LaGrange Symphony Orchestra over the past ten years and I have seen a fledgling musical group transform into a premier performing ensemble. I can't wait to see what surprises the next LSO concert will bring, and I hope to see you there!