

Christmas with the LSO and Sons of Lafayette

Concert Review, Dec. 11, 2007

On this festive occasion, Music Director and Conductor Patricio Cobos made his initial appearance on stage clad in Christmas garb reminiscent of one of Santa's elves, to sustained laughter and applause. He alleged, in jest, that as he formulated the evening's program, he had consulted Santa Claus, whose favorite instrument was the bassoon. A bassoon concerto was therefore included!

In their first offering, the LaGrange Symphony Orchestra set the tone for the evening with a rousing rendition of "Sleigh Ride" by Leroy Anderson, best known for his unconventional piece, "The Typewriter". Next came Hummel's "Grand Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra in F". The bassoon was a favorite with nearly all of the great masters but rarely used as a lead in a concerto or symphony. In that regard, Johaan Nopomuk Hummel, a student of Mozart and Haydn and friend of Beethoven, was almost unique in giving the bassoon the lead in his concerto. Next to the strings, no instrument gives greater scope to the artist than the bassoon.

This was beautifully illustrated by the young and very talented Romanian-born Constantin Barcov. Using exquisite phrasing, Mr. Barcov was equally at home from the lowest to the highest registers of this versatile woodwind. A superlative performance indeed, recognized with a standing ovation.

Following on from the Lafayette Ballet Company's performance of the "Nutcracker" earlier this month choreographed to Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky's original score, last evening the Lagrange Symphony Orchestra delighted the audience with Duke Ellington's modern and more light-hearted interpretation thereof, featuring the strong beat and dominant brass of the big bands of the 30's and 40's much loved by this writer. Of particular interest was "The Sugar Rum Cherry", the Duke's mischievous name for "The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy". The Duke stated he had dressed up this well-known piece in contemporary style "to appeal to the people who are about us today." The Duke would have been well pleased with the way the adaptable Dr. Patricio Cobos and the Orchestra performed his score.

Following the intermission, Loren Pinkerman took over the podium and led the Sons of Lafayette Male Choir and the LaGrange Symphony Orchestra, who, for the very first time, joined forces on one stage. The choir and orchestra began in a classical vein with Antonio Vivaldi's "Gloria in Excelsis" from the Gloria. Then followed the "Hallelujah Chorus" from George Frederic Handel's 'Messiah' wherein all rose to their feet, consistent with the long-established tradition observed on both sides of the Atlantic.

Both were very moving performances.

The Sons of Lafayette and the LaGrange Symphony then transitioned to a lighter vein with the well-known favorites 'See Amid the Winter's Snow'; 'Winter Wonderland'; and 'Deck the Halls'.

The evening culminated with a Christmas carol sing-along created by John Finnigan, in which audience, choir and orchestra enthusiastically took part. The whole program was innovatively created and superbly executed to the obvious delight of the large audience.

The program, with some variations, will be repeated on Saturday, December 15th at 3.00pm, but this time under the baton of guest conductor Manuel Diaz.

Dr. Michael Lock

Dr. Lock is a retired executive and scientist with Milliken.