

Straddling a Stylistic Gulf: The Quad City Symphony, March 9 at the Adler Theatre

Written by Frederick Morden
Sunday, 17 March 2013 17:09

- [Buy OEM Adobe Creative Suite 6 Production Premium \(32-bit\)](#)
 - [Download CrossOver 13.0 MAC](#)
 - [29.95\\$ Infinite Skills - Learning Adobe Audition CC cheap oem](#)
 - [Buy ABest Video to MOV SWF FLV Converter \(en\)](#)
 - [Buy Microsoft Publisher 2013](#)
- ([en](#),[ar](#),[de](#),[es](#),[fr](#),[he](#),[it](#),[ja](#),[ko](#),[nl](#),[pt](#),[ru](#),[bg](#),[cs](#),[da](#),[el](#),[et](#),[fi](#),[hi](#),[hr](#),[hu](#),[id](#),[kk](#),[lt](#),[lv](#),[ms](#),[nb](#),[pl](#),[ro](#),[sk](#),[sl](#),[sr](#),[sv](#),[th](#),[tr](#),[uk](#),[vi](#))
- [Buy OEM Mixed in Key 2 MAC](#)
 - [Buy OEM Autodesk AutoCAD 2012 MAC \(64-bit\)](#)
 - [69.95\\$ Adobe Contribute CS5 cheap oem](#)
 - [Discount - Adobe Audition CS6](#)
 - [29.95\\$ AppZapper 2 MAC cheap oem](#)
 - [Buy Microsoft Windows Server 2008 R2 Datacenter \(64 bit\) \(en\)](#)
 - [Buy OEM Autodesk Factory Design Suite Ultimate 2012 \(32-bit\)](#)

With one foot on the familiar, sturdy dock of 19th Century Romanticism and the other in the precarious boat of innovative and demanding 20th Century Modernism, the Quad City Symphony was able in its March 9 concert to demonstrate diametrically different musical styles without drowning – but not without getting wet.

Without a guest soloist to share the stage and musical load, Music Director and Conductor Mark Russell Smith and the Quad City Symphony showcased two iconic Russian pieces for virtuoso orchestra: Maurice Ravel's orchestration of Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Igor Stravinsky's

The Rite of Spring

. Either piece by itself would have been considered a featured work, but together they were a grueling concerto for orchestra that required the musicians to perform as though each was a soloist.

Both compositions are musical depictions of works from other artistic disciplines: *The Rite* (a piece of Modernism first performed in 1913) accompanied an original story ballet, and *Pictures* (first composed in the late Romantic style period in 1874) described the subjects of paintings by Viktor Hartmann. Both composers used variations in orchestration, tempo, tonality, and melodic texture to differentiate the subject matter or plot of each painting or dance. But the orchestra struggled with the radically different use of these elements, and as a result the contrast between Romanticism and Modernism wasn't always clearly demonstrated in the performance.

Straddling a Stylistic Gulf: The Quad City Symphony, March 9 at the Adler Theatre

Written by Frederick Morden
Sunday, 17 March 2013 17:09

The Quad City Symphony effectively played the recognizable stylistic elements of Romanticism around which *Pictures* was constructed: long melodic lines that ebb and flow with familiar harmonic changes and steady, predictable rhythms.

From the comfort zone of the dock, *Pictures*' unison string melodic lines of the "Gnome" and "Samuel & Schmuyle" were both low and rugged in their musical dialogue. The addition of an alto saxophone to the standard instrumentation in "The Old Castle" produced a soulful, new plaintive tone and balanced melodic exchanges with the bassoon. The energy in the euphonium solo in "Bydlo" – the ox cart – followed the slow rise and fall of its melodic path, as the cellos and basses separated the slow, dirge-like notes that gave it a steady, walking pace. The orchestra repeated the euphonium's solo theme as the accompaniment made one long, even crescendo and diminuendo, mimicking the movement of the ox cart as it approached and then disappeared in the distance.

In "The Market at Limoges," the contrast between the edgy repeating notes in the horns and the spiccato violins was fanciful and provided a lively – though sudden – transition into the powerful brass chords of the "Catacombs." Dark and dramatic timbres in both the dynamics and diminished chords made the exploration of the skulls frightening and suspenseful. The concluding, powerful "Great Gate" – with its long, majestic theme, and the last return of the "Promenade" tune intermingled as counterpoint – brought the piece to a decisive and satisfying end.

While Mussorgsky's music described real artifacts – paintings – Stravinsky depicted an imaginary world, an ancient civilization of pagan Russia whose rituals, dress, and dances were unknown. To make the music uniquely new for his fantasy world, Stravinsky deviated from elegantly shaped Romantic melodies, complementary harmonic movements, and predictable beats and replaced them with small melodic fragments only three or four notes long, strange, unchanging dissonant harmonies, and irregular rhythmic patterns. Stravinsky's disruptive musical ideas required new playing skills and techniques for the orchestra that produced extraordinary demonstrations of musicianship but also revealed technical disparities.

Despite these challenges, Smith and the orchestra launched Stravinsky's shattering, exotic musical powerhouse like a Saturn V rocket. The Quad City Symphony made Stravinsky's scoring breathtakingly explosive, threatening, and nimble – a caged animal tearing at its enclosure in one moment and 100 different kinds of drum sounds the next. The "Ritual of the Two Rival Tribes" featured snarling horns and volcanic rushes of volume from the gong and bass drum, as if you were standing in the middle of a lightning storm. The virtuosic timpani and tuba parts merged into an earthy, pulsating primitivism that was arresting. The short melodic

Straddling a Stylistic Gulf: The Quad City Symphony, March 9 at the Adler Theatre

Written by Frederick Morden
Sunday, 17 March 2013 17:09

figures in the strings sang, and the trumpets were brilliant in the fanfare-ish statements. It was a sonic spectacle.

The orchestral colors were rapturous in the “Procession of the Oldest & Wisest One,” with many layers of cross rhythms juxtaposed over the same chords. They repeated and intensified, gathered volume and accelerated to the end of the dance. The mystical “Kiss of the Earth” dissonant harmonics in the strings were bizarre and strangely enchanting as they were suspended in time for several seconds, bringing the music to a transformative pause that was otherworldly.

In the “Dance of the Young Girls,” the incessant rhythmic chugging of unchanging harmony in the strings and horns propelled the music forward while the woodwinds ornamented them with swirls of sound. The orchestra carefully demarcated sudden dynamic changes that segmented the dance and, despite the complexity of the orchestration, produced discrete colors of alternating unison and dissonant sound.

But with Stravinsky’s innovations and convulsive musical gestures in the “Ritual of Abduction,” about a quarter of the way into the piece, the rhythmic glue that had held the performance together began to loosen, and the melodic fragments that were intended to be played in unison were no longer together. And in “The Sacrificial Dance” – the climatic moment of *The Rite*, with Stravinsky intentionally changing meters more frequently to elevate the dramatic, spasmodic effect of the death dance – the orchestra lost control of the complex, counterintuitive rhythms. Imprecise entrances and rhythmic instability broke the music’s cohesion, and Stravinsky’s carefully planned undulations became chaotic. To their credit, most of the orchestra members played the complicated time signatures with accuracy and intensity, but too many players didn’t and buried the intended abnormal rhythmic structure with unintended irregularity at the worst possible moment, marring the conclusion of an otherwise stunning musical experience. In Stravinsky’s

Rite

, where the complexity of rhythm is the unit of structure, performance solidarity is critically dependent upon absolute rhythmic discipline, a skill that cannot always be taught.

In reaching for *The Rite*, the orchestra exceeded its grasp in the Saturday night performance in the Adler. The orchestra fought – sometimes unsuccessfully – to hold the intricate music together, but it still produced such compelling moments in its performance that at times it seemed unimaginable that a human being could conceive of and perform such music.

Straddling a Stylistic Gulf: The Quad City Symphony, March 9 at the Adler Theatre

Written by Frederick Morden
Sunday, 17 March 2013 17:09

The Quad City Symphony Orchestra will perform the music of Rimsky-Korsakov, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky at its April 13 and 14 concerts, with piano soloist Tom Sauer. For more information, visit QCSymphony.com.

Frederick Morden is a retired orchestra-music director, conductor, composer, arranger, educator, and writer who has served on the executive board of the Conductors Guild. He can be reached at f.morden@mchsi.com.