Written by Zach Carstensen
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With few surprising pieces, this year's Quad City Symphony Orchestra season is best described as "solid." By relying on repertoire mainstays like Beethoven's Third Symphony, Brahms' Fourth, and the Verdi Requiem, music director and conductor Donald Schleicher has created a season that will surely please the Adler crowd but offer them sparse originality.

Nevertheless, there are spots that are potentially very interesting. A classical guitarist will grace the Adler Theatre stage for the December concert, Satie's Gymnopedies will be offered for everyone to hear, and Stravinsky will play an integral role in the new chamber series.

Starting with the April 7-8 concert, the last of the season, Verdi's Requiem Mass is a fitting way to end the year. Part operatic part religious, the requiem is as stirring as it is delightful. A monumental work, it was written in memory of Rossini and was first performed on the one-year anniversary of his death. Even though Verdi was agnostic, the mass captures the essentials of human life – piety, emotion, and the capacity for hope.

Most notable is the "Dies Irae," which comprises well over 40 minutes of the entire piece of music. Though jarring, it captures the torment and pain of the Last Judgment only to conclude with a radiant prayer from the soprano: "Let them pass from death unto life." It will be interesting to see whether the right balance can be struck between the orchestra, the chorus, and the soloists.

The February3-4 subscription concert epitomizes the standard repertoire beautifully. Beginning with Mozart's Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, ending with Beethoven's Third Symphony (the Eroica), and featuring Ravel's Piano Concerto in G, casual concertgoers will be delighted with the familiarity of the music while seasoned veterans will be enchanted by hearing some old favorites again. This concert, while not overly original, should feature the QCSO and Schleicher at their best. Last year, the orchestra deftly handled Beethoven's Emperor Concerto and Fifth Symphony.

On November 4-5, the audience will be reunited with an old friend as James Dixon, former music director and conductor of the QCSO, guest conducts. With Debussy's La Mer, Brahms' Fourth Symphony, and Dixon's familiarity with both pieces, this concert could be the best of the season.

Described by some critics as autumnal in feeling and scope, Brahms' Fourth Symphony seems to fit naturally with the season. Likewise La Mer is one of the supreme achievements of the symphonic literature, deftly capturing the composer's memories of the ocean. The playfulness of the waves and ominous seriousness are all on display here. In interpretation, the orchestra and Dixon might be inclined to offer a more refined reading of La Mer than is necessary.

Mixed into this concert are Eric Satie's Gymnopedies and Hector Berlioz's Roman Carnival overture. While these are unique and interesting works, the more stirring pillars of the concert will likely overshadow them.

While this concert appears good on paper, it's length could be a drawback. As good as Brahms is, his music tends to carry on far too long, and La Mer is often used to conclude a

concert, not serve as its middle piece.

The most nonconforming concert occurs in December, when Sharon Isbin will perform a number of pieces for guitar and orchestra. Even the performance of Dvorak's Eighth Symphony is odd, as it is usually the forgotten predecessor to the more famous Ninth Symphony. The more seasoned classical-music buff will undoubtedly enjoy this concert, while the casual listener might be left in the lurch.

In a similar vein, the March concert offers some less-familiar fare from the likes of Poulenc and Stravinsky. But, unlike the December concert, this one ends on a more traditional note – with Elgar's luminous First Symphony.

Mixed between the standard concert season will be a new chamber series. Beginning at the end of this month, continued in January, and concluding in April, the series will feature an entire concert devoted to Mozart; a brass-inflected excursion with performances of Brahms' Horn Trio, Opus 40 and Poulenc's Sonata for Horn, Trumpet, and Trombone; and what could be a Quad Cities first, the performance of Stravinsky's L'Histoire du Soldat.

Generally speaking, this year's QCSO season is typical, with old standards relied upon for orchestral solidity and guaranteed crowd enjoyment. Ultimately, though, this season's interpretive success or failure will turn on whether Schleicher and the Quad City Symphony can offer the audience increased insight into the standard classical works that have been chosen. If Schleicher encourages mere textbook performances, then the season will be enjoyable but superficial. But if Schleicher is daring, this series of concerts could solidify his spot as one of the area's best conductors.