

MAHLER OWES ME TEN BUCKS

BUT IT'S OK, HE DOESN'T HAVE TO PAY ME BACK.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2009

Mahler for the Children of AIDS

This past Monday I attended a Mahler concert, but not just ANY Mahler concert. It was one of the most significant ones I've been to actually--probably THE most significant, because this just wasn't a part of an orchestral season--this concert was a fund raiser for global pediatric AIDS and the Prevention-of-Mother-To-Child Transmission of HIV.

This concert was presented by the [Catholic Medical Mission Board](#), a group founded in 1928. They tend to focus their efforts (which are significant!) on the HIV/AIDS crisis, and particularly with children. Looking through a [portion of their site](#), I was very impressed with the work they have done, and their integrity as a faith-based organization.

To top that off though, I was thrilled that Mahler's Third Symphony was to be the program for the evening. Not simply because I love Mahler, but because I could think of no other composer as apt for such an evening. Think about it--Mahler was constantly thinking about life, death, and suffering. He was grief-stricken upon the death of his 4 year old, Maria Anna, and in many ways was sensitive to all sorts of suffering on earth. No other composer would have fit the bill as well as he did, because he cared a great deal about the suffering there is on this earth.

Speaking about Mahler's work, Artistic Director and Conductor George Mathew said, "Mahler's magisterial Third Symphony speaks with a sternness and immediacy to the global community to act responsibly today. Tomorrow will be too late for too many". How true!

Before the show began, Maestro Mathew spoke a bit about this fundraiser, and it was clear to see his concern for this crisis. I read in the program, a letter of welcome he had written, and the last sentence was one (of many, I should say) that stuck out in my mind: "We must go forth, bearing witness through music for human love in our aching time and place". So not only was Mahler the best choice of music for this program, but George Mathew was obviously the best person to be leading this massive ensemble.

In addition to his passion for the needy and suffering on this earth, I was amazed at his leadership skills. This was no ordinary orchestra to put together, to say the least. This massive group of people combined the efforts of musicians from many different orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, the MET Orchestra, Brooklyn Philharmonic, Emerson String Quartet, and a host of other orchestras, and music schools as well. What all of that means is that they hadn't played together before as an ensemble--they came together just for this concert! Of all the pieces to put together under such circumstances, Mahler 3 is a monster to conquer. The sheer size of it, its length (his longest symphony, around 90-100 minutes)--all of that for the conductor to deal with, let alone over 100 musicians learning to play with each other for the first time. It is no small feat, to put this work

ABOUT ME



CHANTAL

I'm a classical music critic for Indianapolis

newsweekly NUVO. I also play the double bass from time to time, and I drive as far as needed to hear a good concert!

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together.

In addition to successfully leading this group, he delighted us Mahler fans with performing a work that is not played very often. Mahler 1, 2, and 5 are oft-performed works, but 3 is another matter entirely. Due to the size (which equals more musicians/money) and length (which equals more cost in rehearsals I'm sure, since most orchestras need an extra service or two for it!), we don't hear it often. For me to finally hear this work live was delightful for me.

It was also delightful for me to hear is well-played! While some of Mathew's tempos were a bit slower than I'd like, the orchestra came off very well. Principal trombonist Joseph Alessi, who is Principal of the NY Philharmonic was the main highlight for me. Never have I heard such astounding playing. I have always loved hearing a good trombonist, but have never ventured to call the sound of a trombone beautiful, but that's exactly what his playing was. I very much look forward to hearing him for Mahler 5 tomorrow.

In addition to him, I was especially impressed with mezzo-soprano Susanne Mentzer, who sung with a deep and rich tone; her voice was well paired for for Mahler's choice of texts in this work. Who would have thought just two simple words, "O Mensch!" could have such meaning and intensity woven in to them?

At the end of the concert, the audience, including myself, was on their feet. I hope it wasn't just for the effort of the musicians, and Maestro Mathew, and for a rarely played Mahler symphony though. I hope that people were clapping also for the fact that so many came together for such a good cause. I put my hands together for the orchestra and conductor, but I also was putting them together for the Catholic Medical Mission Board, and for their significant efforts, for their desire to go and help the most needy and vulnerable, for their desire to tackle HIV/AIDS, which seems almost too big to comprehend.

Such an evening of significance has been hard for me to wrap my head around, and more difficult than usual to write about. I have found myself wondering how potent music could be in stirring people to action, in various different ways. This concert was the first musical fundraiser I'd ever been to, to tackle a global epidemic---and I hope it will not be the last!

POSTED BY CHANTAL AT 11:00 PM 
LABELS: MAHLER

3 COMMENTS:

 Anonymous said...

The women of the Dessoff choir, it should be noted, also sang beautifully under the conduction of Maestro Mathew. The choral section, although brief, was the emotional high point of the work, in my opinion.

JANUARY 14, 2009 10:46 AM

 Chantal said...

The Dessoff choir was exceptional, indeed! They are to be commended on their fine singing!

JANUARY 15, 2009 1:17 AM

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