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ANDREW SEWELL, conductor

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Thursday, December 29, 2005

Symphony continues its stellar run—on a Scandinavian note

The Wichita Eagle, Kansas, Mar. 11, 2007

During its last few concerts the Wichita Symphony Orchestra has conveyed a deep, rich tone across the ensemble. It has never sounded better.

This sound and savvy was on terrific display Saturday night in Century II Concert Hall. Conductor Andrew Sewell led the orchestra through a program that was rich with sonic power and bluster, one whose Scandinavian-music theme included the Piano Concerto by Norway's Edvard Grieg and the Symphony No. 2 by Finland's Jean Sibelius.

The Sibelius was most impressive. The sprawling piece -- bold and brassy -- offers both sweeping gestures and folksy interludes. The music somehow captures the epic grandeur of the North, and Sewell sculpted and paced the work to best capture its scale.

The symphony's second movement was brooding and masculine; its third began in a rhythmic frenzy that was soothed by a lullaby introduced by oboist Andrea Banke.

Sibelius is one of music's great symphonists, and his Second Symphony, from 1902, contains echoes of Tchaikovsky and Brahms back to Beethoven. But his music retains an unforgettable sound -- intense and liberating, with contrasts of warm and cold, darkest mystery and silvery light.

Sewell introduced the concert with a short work for strings, "December," by American Michael Torke. A dancing snippet intensified through the orchestra,

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then subsided, then built again. It teased the ear, somewhere between minimalism and a fiddle tune.

Wichita Conductor Becomes Citizen

WICHITA, Kansas, Mar. 9, 2007

It's a big month for symphony in Kansas. Direct from Washington, the National Symphony Orchestra will be in Kansas this month. You can catch it in Wichita on the 25th and in Hays on the 26th.

If you can't wait that long for a good concert, the Wichita Symphony is in concert this weekend. At the helm as always will be conductor Andrew Sewell. But when he takes the stage this time, he will not only be the "maestro," he will also be a U.S. citizen.

Andrew Sewell is a New Zealand-born conductor, now in his seventh season with the Wichita Symphony. It is the first, however, for which he can claim to belong not to the music, but to the country.

"I felt if I gave up citizenship I would be an alien to my own country," said Sewell.

But after 18 years, Sewell decided it was time. And like anyone else, he went to the Sedgwick County Courthouse and made it happen.

"I don't feel different but I'm excited about the next election -- any election -- because I've been paying taxes for a long time and I get to have a say."

Sewell is used to having a say in front of an orchestra. In fact, he conducts two; one in Wichita and the other in Madison, Wisconsin, where his family lives. It's a love affair with music that began in his native land.

"It was actually when I was eight," said Sewell. "I heard the Beethoven 9th and I was enthralled seeing the orchestra live."

Coming to America for school, Sewell never left. The opportunities here were just too great.

Conducting, however, was not his first goal. For this violin player, that didn't come until one day when Sewell was, of all things, mowing the lawn.

"I was flicking out grass while the lawn mower was going. You should never do that. I heard a funny noise and I suddenly noticed my hand was all bloody and I hadn't realized what had happened."

What happened was that Sewell had sheared off part of two of his fingers.

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"I had to have my finger in a splint and it was terribly painful having a finger injury," said Sewell. "It's my playing hand."

That moved his focus to conducting. Even though he healed, it was a move he does not regret.

"I think life would have been different if I didn't have that accident. Funny how things work out."

And work out they did. Sewell went on to conduct shows alongside music legends James Taylor and Art Garfunkle. But it's not the names in lights, rather it's those in the seats -- you and I -- that Sewell cares about the most.

"The best thing one can do as a conductor is be able to communicate across the footlights to the audience what's really happening on stage -- the emotion, the intensity of the music. If you can do that, the job has been done well."

Sewell's eighth season with the symphony has just been announced. For the symphony's schedule, visit their official website.

To view actual article, copy and paste link to your browser :

<http://www.ksn.com/news/local/6399282.html>

Bravura Concert Closes WCO's Great Season

The Capital Times :: LIFESTYLE :: C3

Saturday, April 29, 2006

By Michael Muckian Special to The Capital Times\

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First there was a pause, then applause. Lots of applause.

Cheers followed, and the audience rose to its feet as pianist Philippe Entremont and conductor Andrew Sewell, hands clasped, bowed to bring the curtain down Friday on the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra's inaugural season in the Capitol Theater. A mostly full house cheered Entremont's virtuoso performance of Beethoven's "Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 58," but they might as well have been cheering for a season of superlative performances.

Entremont's delivery was emotionally rich and technically perfect, his hands exhibiting a grace, speed and agility most pianists would find hard to match. His trills at the

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keyboard's high end were remarkably fluid, and there were moments when the French pianist drowned out the rest of the orchestra with the power of his sound, a fitting close to an impressive season.

WCO, under Sewell's direction, delivered a finely honed performance of the Beethoven work, one worthy of an orchestra much larger and more seasoned. The composer, whose music served as a bridge between the Classical and Romantic periods, brought elements of both to the concerto, from the opening *Allegro moderato* to the bright, vivacious *Rondo: Vivace* that closes the 40-minute composition. Entremont's performance captured the musical evolution with vivid clarity, spurred by WCO's more than capable support.

The original program had been altered, with Entremont himself substituting the Beethoven work for the originally scheduled piano concerto by Bach and Shostakovich. A confusing program distributed to patrons offered notes from the originally scheduled performance, raising the question of what a performer of Entremont's stature might have done with a more diverse program.

Friday's final program was less diverse than most WCO concerts, something that has come both to characterize the orchestra and to invigorate its fans. But it did allow the guest artist to deliver a superb performance and Sewell to indulge his personal preference for showcasing composers from Great Britain.

The evening's performance opened with Sir Edward Elgar's "Serenade for Strings, Op. 20." WCO's string section handled the three-movement work with the power and aplomb of a full orchestra. Much of the work of Elgar, known mostly for the graduation march "Pomp and Circumstance," is being joyfully rediscovered. "Serenade for Strings" was already one of his better known works, much of it having to do with the grace and emotion contained in its passages. WCO executed well, giving special emotive interpretation to the achingly lovely *Larghetto* that bridged the work.

Sewell followed Elgar with "Serenade in G" by English composer E.J. Moeran, of which WCO performed all eight brief movements, rather than the more popular six. The composition contained bright orchestral colors and a variety of musical characters, from delicate string sections to bold brass passages.

Such variations are in keeping with the stylistic elements Sewell brings to the WCO itself. As with Moeran's composition, those influences capture our imagination and keep us appreciating what the WCO brings long after the season has ended.

Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra
Philippe Entremont, pianist
Andrew Sewell, cond.
Capitol Theater in Overture Center

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Sewell's Adventurousome Spirit Displayed In Fine Performance

Wisconsin State Journal :: DAYBREAK :: C7

Saturday, February 11, 2006

JOHN AEHL For The State Journal

It has been fascinating, over the past seven years, to observe the adventuresome spirit of Andrew Sewell as he programs concerts for his Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra.

Friday night in the Capitol Theater was an excellent example.

An obscure but lovely oboe concerto, a seldom-performed symphony by a composer much better known for his "Ave Maria" and an opera, a small orchestral suite that was originally written for piano four hands, and a dreamy little tone poem by a composer who may be best known for his musical impression of a steam engine. And the works were partly intertwined, as you will note as you read on.

Nothing big, brash or bold here -- oh, perhaps except for the brassy highlights in the symphony -- but charming, flowing, music, nicely paced and almost perfectly played.

One who did play perfectly was oboist Linda Strommen. With a clean, pure, delicate tone she moved with assurance through a 17-minute piece composed in 1959 by Jean Francaix. "The Floral Clock" has seven connected interludes, intended to describe blooming flowers. But considered entirely on musical values, the movements offer a nice variety of moods, from almost dirge-like into playful, lyrical, upbeat, dreamlike, quick-step and aggressive. Strommen, now an Indianan, whose credentials seem to encompass performances in much of the eastern half of the United States, was given excellent accompaniment by the orchestra. An encore, Erik Satie's "gymnopédie" No. 1 (of three short pieces originally for piano), was beautifully fitted for the oboe and orchestra by Debussy.

Gounod's Symphony No. 1 is charming, sprightly and inventive. It seems to have echoes of early Schubert symphonies, and seems to anticipate, by a year or two in the mid-1850s, Bizet's one and only symphony. (Bizet was Gounod's pupil at the time.) Gounod's work does not quite have Bizet's rhythmic bite or melodic recognition but it does in its own right have a delightful, sunny fleetness. The performance was polished, energetic and convincing.

Debussy's Petite Suite, the most familiar work on the program, owes much of its merit to the excellent 1909 orchestration of the long-lived Henri Busser (1872-1973), who also was connected with Gounod. Working with some fine Debussy melodies, Busser gave them body and an ethereal quality with a prominent flute, and delicate coloring from

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oboe, english horn, harp, tambourine, cymbal and triangle. Also well played.

Arthur Honegger, a Swiss among four Frenchmen, has to be best-known for his "Pacific 231," a rhythmically propulsive work from the 1920s. (Yes, that's a train.) His "Summer Pastorale" is entirely unlike that -- a hazy, dreamlike tone poem of some seven minutes that is marked by prominent horn playing and lyrical strings. Here, too, as throughout the concert, the orchestra played almost faultlessly. A very good, nicely refined, evening.

Bravo, Andrew Sewell, As WCO Fulfills Promise

Wisconsin State Journal :: RHYTHM :: 23

Thursday, December 29, 2005

Jacob Stockinger

Andrew Sewell is the Moses of classical music in Madison. And for that reason he is this column's Musician of the Year for 2005.

For 45 years, the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra wandered through the wilderness, using various halls and venues around the city and its suburbs. Along the way it established some wonderful Madison traditions including the summer Concerts on the Square and the Sing-Out Messiah.

But now, thanks to the Overture Center, where it has become a resident arts group, the chamber orchestra has arrived at a permanent home at long last.

Since the death of David Lewis Crosby seven years ago, Sewell has been the music director of the WCO and, like Moses, has been wandering with his chosen people.

But unlike Moses, Sewell has lived to cross into and dwell in the Promised Land, which in this case is the stunningly renovated Capitol Theater, reborn from the old Oscar Mayer Theatre by architect Cesar Pelli.

All signs point to a successful settling in and long-term residence.

Will the WCO now begin to pose a downtown threat to the Madison Symphony Orchestra, which has had its own successful juggernaut under John DeMain, as some sources suggest?

In a sense, one can only hope so -- if that means a competitive free market of great music. Wouldn't it be something to see the WCO go to "doubles," or repeat performances? After all, DeMain started with singles and now, after 11 seasons, has well-attended triples.

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But ideally, there should be no conflict between the two groups.

There is plenty of repertoire for each orchestra to explore, and plenty of talented soloists to import -- or to "discover" at home over at the UW School of Music -- without duplication.

Sewell, who also heads the Wichita, Kan., Symphony Orchestra, has many strengths. The New Zealand-born and New Zealand-trained maestro is a charmer. But a former pianist and violinist, he's also a gifted and serious musician who gets results. Many fans agree that the WCO has never sounded so good and its programs have never been so interesting.

Of course much of the success can be shared with Sewell's staff, including executive director Bob Sorge, the money, policy and planning man.

But one of Sorge's strengths seems to be that he knows when to get out of Sewell's way. It is Sewell, it seems, who knows how to find and rediscover repertoire, from overlooked Baroque and classical composers to modern French works and contemporary non-European composers. That is in part how he has raised the musical standards for the Concerts on the Square as well as the winter classical season.

Sewell also has a keen sense of up-and-coming performers. He booked violinist Jennifer Koh and pianist Stewart Goodyear before both drew rave reviews in the New York Times.

He possesses a sense of occasion, whether it is the holidays, the anniversaries of Shostakovich and Mozart, the annual Halloween concert that he has turned from a novelty into tradition, or the educational concerts to support young area musicians.

Sewell is ambitious in the right way and has recorded two CDs in two years with the WCO, each featuring full-length works, not snippets. Not for nothing is the latest one entitled "Momentum."

In short, Sewell bodes well for the future of the WCO, which he has revitalized.

One fears that he will soon catch the eye -- and ears -- of some larger, more lucrative market. But while he is here, one looks forward more than ever to hearing just what the WCO can do when other insecurities are taken away from the task of making great music. A new hall, one suspects, will help lift everyone to even higher standards.

What more can one say? Only that in whatever he does, we wish Sewell and the WCO players success.

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Bravo, maestro.
Happy New Year, and thank you.

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