

STYLE

Orchestra, choral society give casual, but rousing performance

Music Review

By WILLIAM W. STARR
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You know things are a bit tilted when conductor Nicholas Smith takes to the podium wearing tails and blue jeans.

And to further complicate matters, the members of the S.C. Philharmonic Orchestra were similarly attired — at least the jeans part — while behind them the massed forces of the Lexington County Choral Society were neatly outfitted in formal wear.

The Lexington group was making its debut in the Koger Center as soloists with the orchestra Tuesday evening, and perhaps they wanted to dress up for the pops concert that drew a near-full house.

The singers, almost 120 by number and directed by Hal McIntosh, acquitted themselves admirably in a series of short pieces that included Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" from "Messiah" and Aaron Copland's

"Zion's Walls." Neither of those, however, represented the choral society's best — or worst — work on this particular evening.

The best was the performance of Hubert Parry's "Jerusalem." It had a lovely setting and was sung with great feeling under Smith's baton. Least satisfactory was the Slaves' Chorus from Verdi's opera "Nabucco," which was attractively sung but lacked even a hint of the burning passion and nationalistic intensity that makes the chorus worth singing in the first place.

Smith led his musicians through their paces in a program that moved from, in the conductor's words, "the sublime to the ridiculous," from Verdi to the "Looney Tunes" overture. It was a fun piece which incorporated themes from movie cartoons and Hollywood into an engaging pastiche.

Chabrier's "Espana" brought some

different and colorful rhythms to the hall, though the orchestral balances were difficult to manage. At one moment the strings seemed to overpower, and the next they could not be heard at all even though they were busily fiddling away. Is that a quirk of the seat or a matter of Smith hearing one thing and the audience another?

Movie fans in the audience also seemed to enjoy the theme from "Raiders of the Lost Ark" by the prolific and talented John Williams. And Smith also offered up a dramatically cogent account of the Prelude to Act III of Wagner's opera "Lohengrin."

Ending the concert was a rousing version of "Battle Hymn of the Republic" with the choral society, the orchestra and soloist McIntosh.

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