

Seriously, it was quite a night

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Life is serious business; and of all the aspects of our lives, comedy and humor are the most serious. This is never more true than in the arts; the comic operas of Mozart are as serious works of art as you could find. Similarly, the comedies of Shakespeare are every bit as insightful and as moving as are his tragedies.

Hanley Jackson understands this.

Hence, his new work, *Aesop's Trumpeter*, is a funny piece of theater, but at the same time a very serious musical composition.

And also a very attractive and successful one.

That is the other quality of Prof. Jackson's compositions: He seems to have an unfailingly fine ear for tonal qualities and for the harmonious juxtaposition of seemingly disparate elements.

Aesop's Trumpeter, "A theater piece for B-flat trumpet and computer generated tape, was given its premiere in All Faiths on Tuesday evening during the scholarship benefit concert presented by Pi Kappa Lambda, the music honor society.

Aesop's Trumpeter opened with prologue in the form of a brief fable, narrated by Jerry Langenkamp.

The computer generated sounds started to a dramatically empty stage, onto which the trumpet soloist — Craig Parker, in this instance — strolled, dressed up as some itinerant bugler of the lost soul. He played the "Call to Battle" against the background of taped sounds that suggested some dimly remembered medieval environment: suggestions of drums and hurdy-gurdy or crumhorns.

The second movement, "Capture", has the soloist playing against taped sounds suggesting gunshots and

missiles, and requires that the trumpeter both physically and musically dodge the slings and arrows.

"Plea", the third movement, opens with John Williams-like bass thumping (c.f. the opening of *Missouri Breaks*) and then opens out into a lush pastoral sequence full of romantic tonality. This is the spiritual core of the work, and Hanley Jackson showed that he can compose music as romantically beautiful as one could wish, yet do so in an uncompromisingly modern idiom.

The music flows without a break into the last movement, *Final Memories*.

First there are quotations from *Petrushka* and *Fanfare For The Common Man* worked into the texture.

Then a blaze of organ-like sounds that suddenly drops down to the thin-wire tension of a solitary strand of sound.

The soloist sits with his back to the audience, playing muted yearnings.

A sudden rush and whirling from the loudspeakers...and the trumpeter falls dead to the ground.

Effective, funny and in the end, a moving work.

The composition should be labeled as being for an acting trumpeter, and Craig Parker rose to the occasion as both actor and musician.

The concert was in fact framed by dramatic events, since the final work was the hilarious *Grand Romantic Opera in Three Acts*.

Everything that you always knew was wrong with opera condensed into a few minutes.

The performance was a triumphant riot, with Jean Sloop, Jennifer Edwards, Jerry Langenkamp and William Myers all rising, or falling, to the occasion.

The performance of this work should become an annual event, though I am not sure that I could take too many more death-bed arias sung

after all vital signs have ceased.

And now, more briefly, the other items on the crowded program.

The music performed by the Walker Trio was of a totally different style than either of the two works discussed so far, and the ensemble played with elegance and style. Inspired, perhaps, by the performance of Hearle's *Tarantella*, the playing of Dvorak's *Slavonic Dance* was as delicate and swave, as well as fiery, as any performance that I have heard from the Walker Trio.

As for the rest of the program, which was every bit as interesting as the performances that I have already described, Grieg swamped Mozart, and both were given a triumphantly cacophonous outing; Reger swamped *God Save the King* in a blaze of orgasmic organ; the woodwind trio brought a moment of pleasant respite to the proceedings and Al Cochran's ankles won by a pinkie-length over Frank Sidorfsky's toes during John Lamb's delightful dances.

But when all is said and done, there surely can be no question — can there? — that the high point of the evening had to be the pyrotechnical solo playing during Dan Hearle's *Tarantella*...a "critical" success, no?...but you had to have been there...

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