

Lack not music's pleasures

by Josh Mailman

It may be years, decades, centuries, before the Olympics come to Rochester. While you're waiting, enjoy the abundant classical music Rochester offers every year, all year round. This fall is no exception. There's something for nearly every taste: standard repertoire; early music from the Renaissance to the Baroque; a wealth of 20th-century modernist classics and New Music; vocal, orchestral, chamber music — you name it. So as dark winter envelops our fair city, remember the famous proverb: Though Athens has its ancient treasures, Rochester lacks not music's pleasures.

If standard repertoire tickles your toes, you're in luck: Brahms, Schumann, Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Mozart are on the menu. Late September offers a grand opportunity. The Eastman School's resident faculty **Ying Quartet**, one of Rochester's shiniest jewels, joins forces with clarinetist **Kenneth Grant**, the principle clarinetist of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, to present Brahms's deep, deeper, and lyrical Clarinet Quintet, Op.115, one of his last and most masterful works. Mendelssohn's Quartet Op.44, No.3 and Shostakovich's Quartet No.5 are also on the program.

Then in mid-October, the Ying Quartet's cellist, **David Ying**, explores other facets of that repertoire in his own recital, which includes Brahms Cello Sonata in F, op.99 and the *Grand Duet* by reclusive St. Petersburg composer Galina Ustvolskaya, a student of Shostakovich's in the 1930s and '40s, when they had a stormy extramarital affair.

Like no one else in the world, the Eastman School's **Malcom Bilson** champions the fortepiano, a forerunner of the modern piano — it has a lighter, punchier sound. The fortepiano is typically apt for late 18th-century music, such as Scarlatti, Haydn, and Mozart, or even Beethoven. Yet Bilson's recital in mid-November explores great Romantic works of the 19th century: Chopin's Nocturne in D-flat, Impromptu in G-flat, Waltz in A-flat; Schumann's fiendish and manic *Kreisleriana*; and Schubert's Sonata in D and Impromptu in C minor. If anyone can pull it off, it is Bilson.

To top it all off, during the same week, conductor **Christopher Seaman** leads the **Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra** (RPO) in a topnotch all-Mozart program. Mozart's Serenade No.12 for Winds, Sinfonia Concertante for violin, viola, and orchestra, and Symphony No.41 "Jupiter" each loom so large they'll virtually bump each other off the stage. Mozart must have been thinking of Rochesterians when he composed the Sinfonia Concertante; its melifluous melodies are enough to melt any of November's premature snow. And as we finally brace for winter on Thanksgiving weekend, out comes the RPO and **Rochester City Ballet's** annual Nutcracker production, just in time to charge up our holiday cheer.

Musicians of the Eastman School of Music are busy as bees performing New Music of the 20th and 21st centuries. In early November, conductor **Brad Lubman** leads **Musica Nova**, Eastman's polished new music ensemble, in masterpieces by two modernist mavericks of the



Ready to face the music: Christopher Seaman of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra.

20th century, Gyorgy Ligeti and Elliott Carter.

The sounds of Ligeti's Chamber Concerto (1970), by now a staple of Eastman School concerts over the last five years, bring to mind twittering machines and intergalactic space travel. For some reason, we rarely hear Carter's music in Rochester. Carter's cantata, *A Mirror on Which to Dwell* (1975), sets Elizabeth Bishop's poems such as "Argument," "Sandpiper," "Insomnia," and "A View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress" in a visceral, imaginative, thorny atonal style. From the soprano singing to the chamber ensemble playing, there's plenty of action to behold in Carter's *Mirror*.

Eastman's student-run New Music ensemble **Ossia** has cooked up four mouth-watering programs for this fall. In Webster Park, on Sunday, October 3, Ossia presents the world premiere of Robert Morris's *Coming Down to Earth*. Morris, the chair of Eastman's Composition Department, composed for Webster Park before (*Playing Outside*, in 2001).

Morris's new work, however, asks the musicians to arrange themselves in and around the audience and also to improvise through a virtually mystical progression of pitches that Morris imagined and then discovered through an elaborate computer program he wrote. Ossia performs *Coming Down to Earth* three times that afternoon.

Ossia's second concert, in mid-October, combines Richard Strauss's über-romantic post-World War II string orchestral elegy, *Metamorphosen*, with mid-20th-century modernist classics *Ramifications* by Ligeti and *Octandre* by Varese, along with a work by 21st-century Swiss composer Beat Furrer. Ossia's mid-November concert pits two pianists together for three works: Crumb's *Zeitgeist* for two amplified pianos, Ives's *Three Pieces* for two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart, and Messiaen's *Vision d'Amen*, also for two pianos.

For their early December concert, Ossia adds a mystical reverberant atmosphere to their sound by moving to Christ Church, around the corner from the Eastman School. In that atmo-

sphere, the searing sounds of Stockhausen's groundbreaking four-channel electronic work *Gesang der Jünglinge* (*Song of the Youths*) (1956) will soar to and from every crack and crevice of the old stone church. No doubt Georgian composer Giya Kancheli's ethereal Gorecki-esque *Exil*, a vocal work, will also gain from the locale. Most of all, however, I look forward to another work by rising star Beat Furrer: his *Presto con fuoco*. Its atonal pulse-minimalism blends the styles of Feldman, Reich, and Crawford-Seeger.

The menu this fall also offers a delectable variety of vocal music, some old, some new. In mid-October, in the Eastman Theatre, conductor **William Weinert** leads the **Eastman-Rochester Chorus**, **Eastman Chorale**, and the **Eastman Philharmonia** in the world premiere of *Four Seascapes* by Pulitzer- and Grammy-winning composer Dominick Argento. (Argento earned a Ph.D. from Eastman in 1956.) His *Four Seascapes* sets poems by Melville, Twain, James, and Wilder.

The **Rochester Bach Festival's** monthly "50 cantatas" series continues, as does the **Rochester Oratorio Society's** annual *Messiah* concert in mid-December, and the **Rochester Early Music Festival** in early November.

Yet **Musica Spei** is the vocal ensemble to watch this year: On December 5 they present one of the mass movements from the monumental and legendary *Choralis Constantinus* by Flemish Renaissance master Heinrich Isaac (c.1450-1517), a contemporary of Josquin. Mark your calendars now for June 11, when Musica Spei performs all of Isaac's *Choralis Constantinus* in an all-Isaac concert. ■