

Two brand-new selections

Posted on Web Exclusive by Tom Aldridge

ISO Classical Series Program No. 19

Hilbert Circle Theatre

June 6-7

My references in the headline are to a piece just 8 years old — for which last Friday the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra gave its American debut — and a piece just 220 years old, of which the ISO gave its first performance. Asher Fisch (a native Israeli) had his ISO guest conducting debut, first playing Haydn's Symphony No. 90 in C and following with Avner Dorman's (also a native Israeli) Ellef Symphony, first performed in Israel in 2000 — the two works referred to above. ISO principal violist Michael Strauss joined Fisch and the orchestra to end the concert with Berlioz's redoubtable Harold in Italy, Op. 16, for Orchestra and Viola obbligato, after Lord Byron.

First the bad news: Fisch failed to deliver this excellent-but-unknown Haydn at the orchestra's usual standards, with many examples of ragged string playing as well as some trumpet entrances lagging behind the strings. This is seldom an ISO problem because — as Fisch himself observed before the concert — “orchestras do not play enough Haydn,” making his No. 90 a personal embarrassment and identifying an important omission in symphony programming. Haydn's string quartets get much better exposure in Indy's chamber venues. And the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra did a wonderful Haydn No. 102 a month ago.

The other bad news: Strauss had previously played Harold in Italy under ISO conductor laureate Raymond Leppard when he was music [director](#) in 1999. On that occasion, Strauss performed it much better. This time, presenting a very soft tone even for a viola, he was covered by the orchestra for nearly half his parts in Harold's four movements. Moreover, when we could hear him, his timbre lacked the complete consistency of Strauss' previous reading.

And now the good news: Fisch and the orchestra did an excellent [job](#) with Harold, showing razor-sharp attacks at the first movement's conclusion and throughout the boisterous Finale: “The Orgies of the Brigands.” Moreover, the two soft middle movements showed careful inflection, allowing Strauss to do his best therein as well.

And the best news of all: The contemporary Ellef Symphony was the highlight of the evening, with 33-year-old Dorman present to accept the audience's thundering ovation. It is so pleasing to report a new work that is more than just noise, but offers new melody, harmony, rhythm and new timbres (or colors) — wholly original but tradition linking. Dorman's blend of percussion with the other instrumental groups alone makes this work stand out from so many that lean excessively on percussion to call it “original.” Dorman's work actually started and ended in the key of D; can you believe it?

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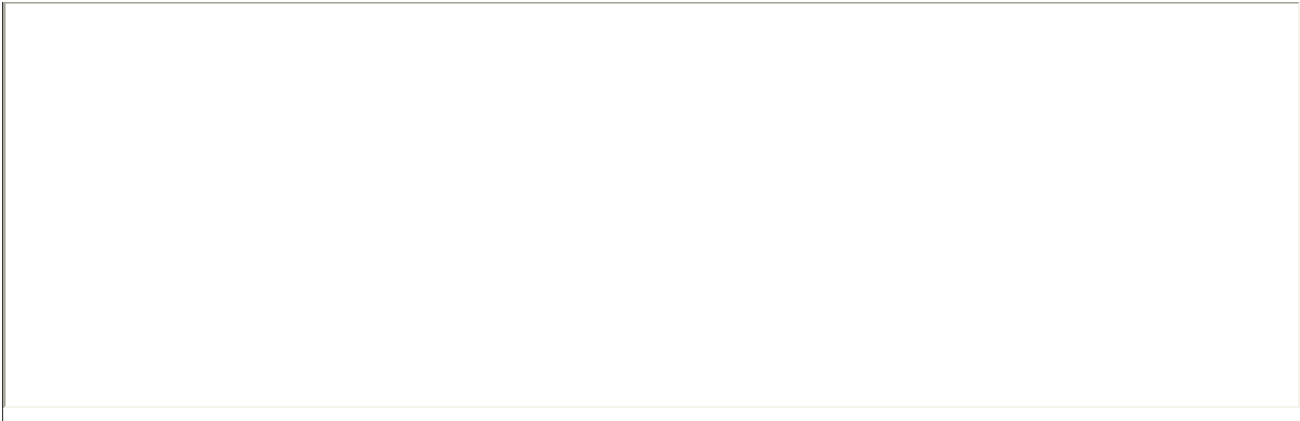
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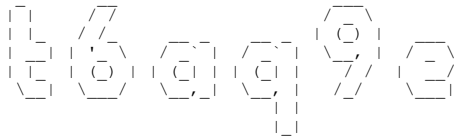
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