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## CONCERT REVIEW: California Symphony loads up listeners' plates with a fine full meal of music

By Georgia Rowe  
TIMES CORRESPONDENT

The California Symphony served up a filling musical feast Sunday afternoon at the Leshner Center, as music director Barry Jekowsky led the orchestra through powerhouse performances of works by Barber, Dvorak, Carl Nielsen, Chris Theofanidis and Kevin Puts.

Barber, Theofanidis and Puts are hardly surprising candidates for Jekowsky's approach: The orchestra, now in its 20th season, has performed an American work on every program since its inception. Barber's Violin Concerto, and new works by Theofanidis and Puts -- both former California Symphony composers-in-residence -- filled the bill handsomely on that count.

Dvorak's symphonies have made regular appearances on Jekowsky's programs as well, although Sunday's concert, which has its final repeat Tuesday evening, offered the composer's less frequently performed tone poem, "The Golden Spinning Wheel."

But Nielsen? Well, yes. The Danish composer may seem the odd man out here (his music isn't performed often by this orchestra, or, these days, by many others.) Yet his "Aladdin" Suite, drawn from incidental music for a 1919 play at the Royal Copenhagen Theater, was a delightful addition, one that afforded Jekowsky the chance to explore the full range of the orchestra's sonic possibilities.

Each work on the program received an attractive performance. Still, with violinist Anne Akiko Meyers serving as the dazzling soloist, it was Barber's concerto that yielded the afternoon's greatest thrills.

Barber's 1941 concerto has always been a test of any soloist's mettle (on first glance at the work's finale, the Philadelphia businessman who commissioned it, and the violinist for whom it was originally intended, famously deemed it "unplayable.")

Meyers, who made her first California Symphony appearance in 1994, returned Sunday in excellent form. The California native launched into the work armed with agile tone, ferocious energy and secure technique; the lyrical first movement came across in a performance of fluid mastery, and the finale, with its bursts of seething passagework, was crisp and well-defined. Meyers doesn't sentimentalize, yet the central movement elicited a rapturous response from the soloist. Jekowsky and the orchestra supplied able support, with eloquent contributions from clarinetist Michael Corner and oboist Deborah Shidler.

Jekowsky also lavished careful attention on Theofanidis' "A Hymn to Music" for woodwinds and orchestra, and Puts' "Furioso" for strings. Each is a California Symphony commission, and each will take its place in a new Concerto for Orchestra scheduled to make its world premiere on the orchestra's May program (additional movements by Kevin Beavers, Pierre Jalbert and Kamran Ince will complete the score.) At Sunday's concert, each movement stood handsomely on its own.

It may be asking too much to expect audiences to digest "The Golden Spinning Wheel" and "Aladdin" all in one sitting, as they were presented back to back in the concert's second half. Dvorak's tone poem and Nielsen's concert suite are both enveloping works for large orchestra, yet Jekowsky, defying the risk of sonic overload, conducted with commitment and considerable brio. The picturesque qualities of each emerged in beautiful detail, with the fragrant exoticism of Nielsen's score much enhanced by an 11-voice women's chorus directed by Festival Opera's Joshua Elder.

- WHAT: The California Symphony presents works by Barber, Dvorak, Carl Nielsen, Chris Theofanidis and Kevin Puts
- WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday

- WHERE: Leshner Center for the Arts, Civic Drive at Locust Street, Walnut Creek
- HOW MUCH: \$39-\$59
- CONTACT: 925-943-SHOW, [www.dlrca.org](http://www.dlrca.org)

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