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Wednesday, Nov 05, 2003

# Music

Posted on Tue, Nov. 04, 2003

## Chang's talents sparkle, prove his staying power

By Georgia Rowe  
TIMES CORRESPONDENT

PRODIGIES COME and prodigies go, but Sunday evening at the Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts, Barry Jekowsky and the California Symphony introduced a young performer who will most likely be around for a while. In a few years, we may even see him return as one of the orchestra's resident composers.

Fifteen-year-old Sebastian Chang was the featured attraction on the program, which inaugurated the orchestra's 17th season. As the latest in a long line of youthful musicians to appear with the Symphony, he proved above-average in his class; joining the orchestra in Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," he displayed all the signs of a serious artist in the making.

Chang, who hails from Southern California, plays assertively and with plenty of sparkle. Sunday, he launched into Gershwin's score (orchestrated by Ferde Grofe) with a winning blend of style and dexterity, tossing off the composer's difficult passagework with fluency and observing the jazzy touches that give the work its all-American flavor.

He received tremendous support from Jekowsky and the orchestra, who gave the score a robust, well-paced reading.

There were a few instances when Chang seemed to lose the rhythmic pulse that is key to any outstanding performance of "Rhapsody," and the pianist will doubtless master that aspect of the work in years to come. There was much to enjoy in his playing, with his technical flair and forthright spirit carrying the day.

Chang the composer returned with an encore. His "Diabolic Dialogue" for solo piano offered another side of the young artist -- the one that has been repeatedly honored with composing awards from ASCAP, BMI and others. The six-minute, single-movement work has a distinctly American sound that made an apt follow-up to the Gershwin, and Chang the pianist gave it an ebullient performance.

The rest of the concert, which repeats tonight at 8, yielded attractive results. As Jekowsky explained to the audience, each work on the program (excepting Chang's composition) was written within the same six-year period in the early 20th century, and it was illuminating to hear the range of ideas, compositional styles and orchestral textures represented.

Respighi's "Pines of Rome," performed in the second half, sounded splendid. Jekowsky marshaled his forces for the most focused, unified playing of the evening, and each of the work's four scenes emerged as distinct. The final episode, "The Pines of the Appian Way," was brilliant, with the woodwinds making beguiling contributions and the brass blaring exuberantly.

Jekowsky also achieved excellent results with "The Unanswered Question" by Charles Ives. With trumpet soloist James Dooley stationed on an upstairs balcony, Ives' brief but pointed 1906 score sounded as beautiful and enigmatic as ever.

The program opened with Ibert's "Divertissement." Composed in six movements -- including a serene Nocturne, a buoyant Waltz and a swaggering March -- the score bristles with charm and tongue-in-cheek wit, and Jekowsky and the orchestra captured its essence in a crisp, articulate performance.

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- WHAT: The California Symphony presents works by Gershwin, Ibert, Ives and Respighi
- WHEN: 8 tonight
- WHERE: Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts, Civic Drive at Locust Street, Walnut Creek
- HOW MUCH: \$20-\$59
- CONTACT: 925-943-SHOW, [www.dlrca.org](http://www.dlrca.org)





  
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