

Robert D. Thomas/Class Act

Reviews, features, commentary and other information about classical music in Southern California.



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OVERNIGHT REVIEW: Pasadena Symphony opens 86th season

By Robert D. Thomas

Music Critic

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Igor Stravinsky's score to the ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, is 100 years and five+ months old but it remains one of the most unsettling works ever written, no matter how often you've heard it. Pairing "Rite" with Leonard Bernstein's *Serenade* and Shostakovich's Festive Overture made for a formidable opening concert to the Pasadena Symphony's 86th season Saturday afternoon at Ambassador Auditorium.

The program—David Lockington's first as the PSO's fifth music director — offered major challenges for the players, conductor and the audience; the latter included a sizeable number of children and young people (always a healthy sign for an orchestra).

The 57-year-old, British-born Lockington's conducting style seems precise (judged from an audience seat) and he generates a great deal of energy on the podium. As we learned from when he first conducted the PSO in 2012, the orchestra clearly responds well to his leadership. Lockington also delivered erudite comments in the preconcert lecture and prior to the playing of *Serenade*.

In *The Rite of Spring* Principal Bassoonist Rose Corrigan spun an appropriately ominous line at the beginning and Lockington and the orchestra built the tension until the first driving, rhythmic section exploded. The orchestra's winds and the percussion section, headed up by Timpanist Wade Culbreath, were in top form throughout the afternoon. The overall performance was solid, but not breathtaking and the audience responded with a generous standing ovation.

Lockington chose Bernstein's *Serenade* as a companion piece because, in his words, "I think of it as a mid-century look at a musical language that was made possible by *The Rite of Spring*." The rarely played 30-minute work, written in 1954, was inspired by Plato's dialogue "Symposium" and is the most un-Bernstein sounding piece he ever wrote, although his familiar snappy, jazzy motifs (think *West Side Story*) do finally emerge in the final movement.

Anne Akiko Meyers gave a superbly virtuosic performance, playing on a 1741 Guarneri del Gesu violin, "Ex-Vieuxtemps," for which she recently received lifetime performance rights (details [HERE](#)) Her lyrical portions sang sweetly (her pianissimos were particularly striking) and she sailed through the thorny sections as if they had been written for her instead of for violinist Issac Stern. Lockington and the orchestra provided supple support.

The program opened with a sizzling rendition of Shostakovich's *Festive Overture*. Lockington took tempos that were just short of frenetic but not over the top and the PSO was at its razor-sharp best.

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- Because orchestra schedules are planned well in advance, this was the only concert that

Lockington will conduct this season. Beginning next season, he's expected to lead at least three of the classical concerts. Read my story on Lockington [HERE](#).

- The Pasadena Symphony's holiday concerts are Dec. 14 at 4 and 7 p.m. at All Saints Church, Pasadena. Grant Cooper conducts the orchestra, Los Angeles Children's Chorus, vocalist Lisa Vroman and the L.A. Bronze handbell choir. [INFO](#).
- Nicholas McGegan ([LINK](#)) makes his first appearance as the PSO's principal guest conductor when he leads the orchestra on Jan. 11 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. at Ambassador Auditorium. The program is scheduled to be Dvorak's Symphony No. 6 and Chopin's Concerto No. 1 in E minor, with 13-year-old (yes, you read that right) pianist Umi Garrett ([LINK](#)) as soloist. Info on the concert is [HERE](#).

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