

Princeton Symphony Orchestra presents Missy Mazzoli's 'Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)'

A galaxy of music

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March 25, 2019 in *Music*

Growing up in Lansdale in a nonmusical family, Missy Mazzoli was more apt to hear classical music on the car radio than in the concert hall. Perhaps this accounts for the fresh, uninhibited quality of Mazzoli's compositions, which have taken the classical scene by storm—including her *Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)*, which opened the Princeton Symphony Orchestra's March concert.

In less than a decade, she has produced a prodigious amount of music, including operas (she's writing one now for the Met), with a recognizable style and a strange beauty that appeals to critics and audiences alike.

Making the most of the orchestra

In Princeton, music director Rossen Milanov took the podium. From the very start of the work, Mazzoli invites us to step outside the boundaries of time and space, with glissandi in the strings that create brief shifts between concord and dissonance.

The work taps the resources of a full modern orchestra, with whimsical additions such as a spring coil and harmonicas in three keys (played by the brass section) that provide a breathy human element to the cool



A fresh and uninhibited sound: Composer Missy Mazzoli. (Photo by Marylene Mey.)

ambience of outer space suggested in the orbits of Mazzoli's music.

Percussive riffs, such as a brief rattle of a snare drum, burst through the creamy swelling of tones like meteoric punctuation. Mazzoli appeared on stage to accept well-deserved applause for this work of haunting mood and intriguing construction.

Virtuoso and interpreter

The second work on the program could also be characterized as modern, though it was written nearly 30 years ago. Composed for Sir James Galway,

Lowell Liebermann's Concerto for Flute and Orchestra showcased the technical and artistic mastery of flutist Chelsea Knox, principal flutist of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and former principal flutist of the Princeton Symphony Orchestra. A student of Jeffrey Khaner, principal flute with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Knox transformed the challenging leaps and runs that course through the score into magical expressions of musical sensibility. She did this without breaking a sweat, maintaining an almost classical Grecian poise and serenity that added to the loveliness of this traditionally tonal composition.

While the first movement seemed largely a tribute to Haydn's Clock Symphony and John Williams's scores for the Superman films, there were moments of intensity worthy of Bartók's vast Concerto for Orchestra. The second movement was a stately affair, with penetrating brass interjections and brief duets of flute and piano, flute and harp, nourished by the satin-smooth tone of the flutist. The work ended with an immediate attack by the flute and a jaunty reply by the full orchestra. Some bold brass excursions and an acceleration near the end nearly took my breath away, underscoring the orchestra's versatility and Knox's gifts as both a virtuoso and an interpreter.

A Dvořák finish

The final work on the program was Dvořák's Symphony No. 8 in G Major, a lavish display of lilting folk melodies and simple but satisfying musical architecture in the Romantic style. Milanov clearly thought out the trajectory he wanted this work to take, opening with a languid introduction, building at a trot, and concluding with a gallop. The conductor interpreted the composer's vivid dynamic contrasts throughout the work to good effect, creating an experience of unrelenting interest and toe-tapping charm. Never lost is the dancelike quality of Dvořák's musings, each movement filled with polkas, *dupáks*, and other folk diversions, each one sassier than the one before.

The conclusion of the last movement never fails to excite, as we strain against those tethered measures that seem to go on forever, knowing the orchestra is about to explode in a final salvo that will blast us off our feet and have us dancing all the way home.



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A magical music sensibility: Flutist Chelsea Knox. (Photo courtesy of Princeton Symphony Orchestra.)

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