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CLOSURE AVERTED AND THE BAND PLAYED ON

📅 August 8, 2022 ([Http://Www.Artssf.Com/Closure-Averted-And-The-Band-Played-On/](http://www.artssf.com/closure-averted-and-the-band-played-on/)) 👤 Paul Hertelendy ([Http://Www.Artssf.Com/Author/Paul-Hertelendy/](http://www.artssf.com/author/paul-hertelendy/))

SANTA CRUZ, CA—Resolute not to let Covid win for the third year in a row, the plucky Cabrillo Festival cobbled together a concert program with half an orchestra to prevent yet another cancellation.

After the total washouts of 2020 and 2021, this week Cabrillo found no less than 16 orchestra members who were suddenly Covid positive, leaving it with only tatters of a woodwind and brass section. So with just percussion and a string orchestra intact, Music Director Christian Măcelaru pasted together a curious last-minute program to prevent a Aug. 6 cancelation, winning ovations for the effort. Strange doings in the never-say-die stirrings of contemporary symphonic music.

What next, a Faustian pact with the devil to make Covid finally relent in its crash program? Well, no devil, to be sure, but there was a ghostly summons in Richard Danielpour's "Apparitions." And you could hardly ignore the insistent half moon overhead, casting its spells over the indestructible old Civic Auditorium.

Galen Lemmon and his crew rapped out two short percussion-only pieces forceful enough to wake the dead and break any jinxes as well. Offsetting those was a feathery piece from the Ukrainian refugee composer Valentin Silvestrov, 85, who in "Silent Music" offered mysterious late-night waltzes—wispy, pillow-soft and, I think heavy-hearted.

Held over from the original program was Kevin Puts' Second Oboe Concerto ("Moonlight"). It takes a dramatic turn in the middle movement bristling with anger and resentment, wherein the cellos grunt passionately to counter the oboe's oblivious staccato dances. Even when voicing the most robust sounds, the oboe is unable to calm the orchestra until the cadenza and the finale movement suggesting a peaceful reconciliation. Oboist Katherine Needleman's play was dominated by her extreme caution.

The role of the late leading symphonist Christopher Rouse had to be reduced to his boisterous percussion piece "Ogoun Badagris," suggesting some Haitian ritual (what, yet more mystics on this wondrous lunar night?). Written in 1976, it was the only pre-Millennium opus on the docket.

Danielpour's "Apparitions" produced ear-tickling sounds, from the ghostly violins to the bowing on vibraphone keys, working on "the precipice of imagination," per his account. (He had been inspired by a "haunted" opera house in Argentina.) The work reminds you of the most unsettling parts of "Pierrot Lunaire" or "The Turn of the Screw." There is an elusive violin solo too with darting phrases. But, at a half hour, the sheer ballast of the opus weighs down its effectiveness. And why suddenly quote those ageless kids' songs, "Pop Goes the Weasel" and "Ach du lieber Augustin?"

The mastermind of the last-second program shuffles was Cristian Măcelaru on the podium, the man who conducted as though not a drop of perspiration was gracing his forehead. The audience—mostly a diehard band of rabid festival supporters—was strongly supportive, realizing the magnitude of having any concert taking place at all.

MUSIC NOTES—Two of the composers, Puts and Andrea Reinkemeyer, appeared and annotated their works....For the season-finale concert the next night, Jake Heggie had to rework and abbreviate his new orchestration of the Holocaust violins of hope piece, "Intonations," to match the scaled-down orchestral forces.


Given the Covid epidemic, the festival maintained strict mask requirements throughout, along with vaccination requirement for all attendees. How strict? I removed half of the mask in mid-concert to dry a runny nose, and immediately an usher tapped me on the shoulder to cease and desist.


CABRILLO FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC, Aug. 6 at the age-tested Santa Cruz (CA) Civic Auditorium, 307 Church St. For Cabrillo info: www.cabrillomusic.org (<https://cabrillomusic.org/>).




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