

SYMPHONIC CONTRASTS COMPLIMENT

Concert features new, known works

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BUTLER TWP — Saturday night's concert by the Butler County Symphony Orchestra at the Butler Intermediate High School was a study in contrasts. Music by composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was bookended by an avant-garde piece written by Alberto Ginastera with a short work by Gabriela Lena Frank squeezed in the middle for good measure.

Starting off the evening was a familiar song: "America the Beautiful." The orchestra presented lovely variations on the theme of that tune to the delight of the audience.

It was followed by the well-known "Symphony No. 40 in g minor, K 550." Despite its imposing title, it is easily recognized, having been the fodder of countless movies, TV shows, advertisements and even cartoons. Framed in four movements, the piece began with a light delicate melody, bounced to a faster, more forceful motif and repeated both like a musical ping pong ball.

The second movement was more lyrical, verging on flirtatious, which contrasted with a more assertive but not ponderous melody. The opening of the third movement was quick and powerful, but it was countered by a sweet slow middle section before reprising the opening theme in grandiose style.

The fourth movement is another famous melody, greeted like an old friend by the audience. Its brisk tempo and light pizzicato in the strings was replaced by a surging crescendo that swept from one section of the orchestra to the other and back like an ocean wave.

Although the work was familiar, it is also difficult to play, but the Butler Symphony Orchestra did so with alacrity under the skilled direction of Maestro Matthew Kraemer. It's

obvious why Mozart's music has such enduring appeal — it's still enchanting.

Up next was a premier titled “Concertino Cusqueno” by Gabriella Frank. The composer harkened back to her ancestry in Peru to create a work that at times was modern and dissonant, while other times was reminiscent of native people who once inhabited the country. The result was similar to strolling through a crowded open-air market and hearing all the sounds of the country clamoring for attention. The work ended as it began with muted tones of a flute, an oboe and the celesta with the timpani quietly hovering in the background, harking back to Peru's earliest inhabitants. The quirky melodies and syncopation were challenging to the orchestra, but were once again played with precision.

Alberto Ginastera's “Variaciones Concertantes” continued the overall theme of contrasts and closed out the evening with short vignettes that were strung together like many-colored beads on a necklace. Each had its own color, voicing and melody. In many ways, it recalled Britten's “Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra” as Ginastera paired various instruments in unusual combinations.

In the first variation, the cello teamed with the harp in a mystical duet. Another featured a clarion call by the brass, which was answered by a rhythmic theme in the violin and flute. Each segment was distinct, and the juxtapositions created new and interesting tonalities.

A program such as this is challenging to both orchestra and audience. New sounds and melodies are often met with suspicion, but the program was well played and well accepted, proving again that all music was once new — even the stuff that's been around for centuries. All it takes is an orchestra bold enough to give it a try.
