

CCO's season finale well worth waiting for

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The Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, conducted by music director Keith Lockhart, explored some exciting and curious corners of the repertory in its Sunday afternoon concert in Memorial Hall.

They opened with the work nearest the mainstream, Maurice Ravel's 1917 war memorial *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, which took the form of a cool and formal dance suite despite its origins in Ravel's traumatic war experiences. Lockhart chose to emphasize this coolness. The best example of the performance's unsentimentality came in the second-movement "Forlane," where he kept a firm grip on the lilting 6/8 rhythm. This stylized dance movement never swayed or languished, but ticked back and forth rather attractively.

The most impressive feature of the *Concierto Evocativo* for horn by Cornell University composer Roberto Sierra was the writing for the string-orchestra accompaniment. Colorful and dramatic, with a lot of special effects, it was also wonderfully clean and economical.

Quiet intensity was Sierra's preferred mode here for engaging and holding the listener's attention. More boisterous episodes, some based on the rhythms and idioms of the composer's native Puerto Rico, were constantly being interrupted by ethereal, lyric moments. The whole was quite beautiful and compelling and effectively played by horn soloist Eric

CONCERT REVIEW

Ruske.

After intermission, Ruske returned for the *Concertino in E minor* by Carl Maria von Weber, a rare gem encountered in the concert hall probably once every couple decades, if that often. Weber is best remembered for his operas, and the solo horn here is treated like an operatic character — a tenor lead who is asked to charm, emote, serenade the heroine, bare the depths of his soul, and, especially in the work's hair-raising finale, scamper with panache.

Not to be completely outdazzled by the soloist, the orchestra offered an exuberant accompaniment, with great attention given to balance and detail by Lockhart. He kept one final trick up his sleeve: After the horn's big finish, the orchestra dashed off the last five bars in a surprising *presto* — thrilling exit music for the hero. Ruske rose to the challenge throughout, and the audience rose for him, inspired to a standing ovation.

To close the concert, and the CCO's season, Lockhart chose the *Sinfonietta* by Francis Poulenc, a highly eclectic piece, tender, wry, and, occasionally, downright silly. The lushest sounds of the afternoon were heard here, with the orchestra switching from operatic to cinematic color. An engaging crispness was available when required, too, in this convincing performance.