

Variations on a theme? It's how Northbrook programs

By John von Rhein

Tribune music critic

Music director Lawrence Rapchak wants his Northbrook Symphony Orchestra to be known for what it does *differently* from other orchestras.

Rather than chasing after the same soloists and playing the same war horses as other groups, his orchestra embraces theme programming—with an adventuresome twist. One Rapchak concert five years ago treated listeners to a night in Old Bohemia; more recently the orchestra tackled a selection of “victory music” through the ages.

Very often the conductor will anchor such programs with neglected or forgotten repertory that deserves to be heard, especially when played by a fully professional orchestra.

One such piece is the “Choros” No. 10 for chorus and orchestra by the famed Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos. It will be the centerpiece of a concert by the Northbrook Symphony and Roosevelt University Conservatory Chorus on Sunday at Northbrook’s Sheely Performing Arts Center.

“The Spirituality of Music” will set Villa-Lobos’ wildly colorful evocation of the Brazilian rain forest against the classical nobility of Beethoven’s Choral Fantasy and shorter works by Mozart, Lalo, Rimsky-Korsakov, Leonard Bernstein and Morten Lauridsen.

“I try to make every one of our programs feel like a mini-festival, presenting the entire spectrum of music rather than winding up being a pale imitation of what everybody else is doing,” says the conductor, now in his eighth season as Northbrook Symphony music director.



Lawrence Rapchak's Northbrook Symphony tackles the sultry “Choros” No. 10 of Heitor Villa-Lobos Sunday at the Sheely Center for the Performing Arts.

PREVIEW

Northbrook Symphony Orchestra

A wild ride through the rain forest, pith helmet optional

When: 4 p.m. Sunday

Where: Sheely Center for the Performing Arts, Glenbrook North High School, 2300 Shermer Rd., Northbrook

Price: \$15-\$37, \$5 students and children; 847-272-0755

The same audience fascinated by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s “Beyond the Score” series should find the Northbrook Symphony’s smaller-scaled approach equally absorbing, says Rapchak. His own pre-concert and podium talks do much to make the classical experience more accessible to his audiences.

The maestro’s enthusiasm for the Villa-Lobos “Choros” No. 10 (1926) knows no bounds, and he is convinced the audience will

be blown away by its flamboyant scoring, pounding rhythms and exultant choral chanting.

“It’s such a brazen work, one of the most exciting things I’ve ever heard,” says the conductor. “I call it the Brazilian ‘Carmina Burana.’ It’s mad, phantasmagorical, jungle-fantasy music. Villa-Lobos was hitting on all cylinders when he wrote this piece.

“The *raison d’être* of the Northbrook Symphony under me,” he continues, “is to continually put this kind of mix out there and to keep a lot of [worthwhile] music alive.”

Indeed, Rapchak regards his pushing the repertory envelope as key to building an avid core audience in the Northbrook area as well as attracting new listeners from throughout the Chicago metropolitan area.

He may just be on to something.

Meanwhile ... cue the jungle drums.

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