

music

New perspectives

The music of Harold Owen's new passion is ingenious, but the experience of attending it Sunday night has important non-musical aspects as well.

About 400 people came to the Central Lutheran Church for the premier of "The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Saint Mark." Owen, a professor known as much for his expertise on the Moog electronic synthesizer as for his mastery of Baroque instruments, composed the passion in fulfillment of his doctoral requirements at the University of Southern California and — one suspects — other requirements.

Among the dramatis personae are the People, played by the audience. Our performance was fair to middling, other participants were superior. It is moving merely to see Neil Wilson in the role of Jesus Christ, in conventional modern dress (suit and tie) standing beneath the stylized, simple, sculpted crucifix. His voice and body movements are without exception controlled and graceful.

Conductor Royce Saltzman binds the world together as he turns to conduct the orchestra, men's and women's choruses (members of the University Singers and Chamber Singers), the soloists, the narrator and the audience. His hands are precise and poetic.

The narrator, Philip Natwick, pastor of the Lutheran church at 18th and Potter, stepped in the day before the performance to substitute for Francis Theimann (a professor of education), a flu victim. Natwick's rich voice bent, boomed, or blended with the text and music as appropriate.

The text itself shows insight. The composer's sensitive selection of portions from the gospel psalms from the Old Testament and prayers from various liturgies enhanced the dramatic impact and originality of the work.

But the music was what transcendentalized the evening. From the outset, a fascinating effect is achieved with the double chorus. The women sing a motive and sustain a note, the men come in with another motive and sustain a note one interval from the women's. By classical standards it should be dissonant, but it is not. An echo effect is obtained, as if the singers were climbing a mountain and certain tones stuck in rock crevices, lingering while new tones are sounded. It has a shimmering quality.

When two hymns are sung simultaneously — "Faithful cross" and "Sing, my tongue" — in an antiphonal arrangement, the vocal arpeggios evoke a rainbow of fresh hues. Weird harmonies, asymmetrical rhythms, counterpoint passages abound, without calling undue attention to themselves, as might seem to be the risk with "far out, modern" music.

The descriptive quality of the music is inventive throughout. When Peter tells Jesus he will not renounce him, the choral voice is ragged, not together. The cello yawns when Jesus comes to Peter and says, "Sleepest thou? Coudest not thou watch one hour?" When the bass drum sounds, hard and brief, and the narrator declares, "And they cru-cified him," some members of the audience leapt, as if jolted.

The staging was consistent with the dramatic effect. The orchestra was upstage, the choruses in the first several rows of the congregation, Pilate (James Kempster and Guy Aydelott, standing two-faced swathed in a red scarf) stage left, the high priest (Peter Lovely) stage right, the narrator on the far right, and Jesus Christ in the center toward the rear — or what would be the apex of the cross shape formed by the players' positions.

It was a new perspective on an old and powerful story.

Abbie Ziffren

EOIN NUC presents OMURCHU

speaking on
"Culture and Revolution in Ireland"

It will be argued that culture is the central weapon of an oppressed people, that Imperialism therefore destroys culture and communities, creating rootless, isolated individuals, and that it is the task of socialism to integrate the people with their true history. Discussion will center on the Irish struggle and its relation to other colonial situations.

Mr. O Murchu is a member of the central committee of SINN FEIN, the political arm of the Irish Republican Movement, of which the IRA is the military wing. He is as well editor of TEOIRIC, a theoretical journal of the Republican Movement. He has written extensively on the theory of revolution, particularly on culture and language revival, and on the relation of cultural and economic alienation to the need for national and social revolution.

Thursday, March 8
7:30 pm 150 Science
Admission free
Donations welcome

Bud Drinkers, can you figure this out?

Ralph bought a 6-pak of Budweiser and invited four friends over to share it. Since he bought, he expected to have two cans to himself, but unfortunately when he returned to the refrigerator for his second, he found it missing. So he asked who took it. Al said, "Joe drank it." Joe said, "Dan drank it." Dan said, "Joe, that's a lie!" And Bill said, "I didn't drink it." If only one of these statements is true, who really drank it?



ANSWER: If you assume Al is the guilty one, Dan's and Bill's statements are true. If you think it's Joe, then Al's and Dan's statements are true. And if you think Dan did it, then Joe's and Bill's statements are true. Obviously Bill is the Budweiser snatcher, since then only Dan's statement would be true. Moral: If Ralph had bought five 6-paks, they could have spent more time drinking and less time arguing.

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Contact:

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