

# Let the music Soar

■ The Eugene Symphony explores the passing life during its 'Death and Transfiguration' performance



## Music

By Sara Jarrett  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Death rang in the ears of the living as the stench of charred flesh wafted along the streets while bodies burned. Screams of sorrow echoed throughout.

Cholera clutched the livelihood of Paris in the spring of 1832, taking no mercy. Survivors of the plague would never be the same.

In response to the surrounding tragedy, German composer Franz Liszt sought consolation in his music. It was then that "Totentanz for Piano and Orchestra," was created. This work, hailed as "the most powerful of all works for piano and orchestra for its originality of idea and form, for the beauty, depth and power of theme," according to a Hult Center release statement, is composed of a set of variations on the Gregorian chant melody Dies Irae, the dance of death.

This moving work is a favorite of Dean Kramer, an associate professor of piano at the University of Oregon School of Music. He will act as a guest solo pianist with the Eugene Symphony during

tonight's performance of "Der Totentanz," under the invitation of Miguel Harth-Bedoya, the Eugene Symphony's musical director and conductor.

Kramer is especially intrigued by this work because of the oft-misunderstood depth of Liszt's character.

"The thing that freaked his contemporaries out," Kramer said, "was the complexity of his personality."

Liszt has been described as a demonic virtuoso with a heavy orientation toward God, Kramer said. This juxtaposition may also be why Liszt's works are often left out of modern performances. He remains, for the most part, an obscure artist.

"I decry the lack of initiative of pianists, much greater than I, who do not bring 'Der Totentanz' to [the listeners]," Kramer said. "So many obscure works [from different artists] deserve to be heard."

One idea Kramer has for the future, he said, is a performance dedicated to works by composers and musicians he feels are brilliant, but have yet to become well-known.

"I don't see myself as a scholar," he said. "I just want to bring music to life because I think I understand it more [than a lot of people]."

Kramer's stint with the Eugene Symphony tonight, "is a wonderful opportunity for me to interact with the community," he said. "Not only on music, but on ideas



Scott Barnett Emerald

Associate professor of piano Dean Kramer is a guest solo pianist for tonight's Eugene Symphony performance.

of the 19th and 20th centuries."

The passing of human life has always inspired artists.

"The program doesn't deal with the tragedy of death," Harth-Bedoya said Wednesday afternoon, during a lecture demonstration at the Hult Center, "but portrays a particular moment that we all will have to think about ... I just couldn't stay away from this topic."

The planning of this performance, just days before Halloween, wasn't a complete coincidence, Hult Center marketing director Patricia Cusick said.

"Death & Transfiguration" was originally planned for February, but "when the flowers pop up you don't want to talk about death," Cusick said. She said her job is to be in tune with people's sensibilities.

The entire 1999-2000 season titled "Let Your Spirit Soar," speaks to a particular human issue or theme, she said. Subsequently, the concert titled "Love" is now scheduled for February.

Essentially, the bigger planning

issue for Harth-Bedoya has been to plan the last season of the millennium to look at various human issues throughout history, Cusick said, without focusing only on classical music.

"Above all, [Harth-Bedoya] is a humanist. He loves music as expression of a human theme," she noted.

Symphony listeners tonight will first hear orchestral excerpts of Wagner's epic opera "Tristan und Isolde."

This Romeo/Juliet type story is "not really what is important [though]," Harth-Bedoya said.

The piece is about "dying in the most sublime situation, next to the person you love," he expanded. "Tristan und Isolde" also portrays what Wagner was personally struggling with at the time.

"The person and music is so closely linked [between Wagner and Tristan], that it's not just a story ... It's a diary page ... What's still so compelling about 19th-century music is that they wrote their hearts out," Kramer said.

The Prelude and Liebestod will

be the only parts of the piece performed tonight, and the words will be omitted.

"It'll probably be the most condensed Wagner you'll ever get," Kramer said.

Ending the performance will be Richard Strauss' "Death and Transfiguration," which will leave the audience on not necessarily a lighter note but a higher one. The music takes the listener on a journey through a man's last hours.

He starts thinking about what his life was, but at the same point he realizes he doesn't want to go yet. He keeps this struggle of remembering more and hoping for more, Harth-Bedoya said. Finally, when the moment of death comes, the music suddenly becomes much happier, as if the man begins "building a beautiful new life."

"Death and Transfiguration" will be performed in the Silva Concert Hall at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts tonight at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$12 to \$36; \$10 for students and youth.

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