

Bach on Track

Transition offers new opportunities for Oregon Bach Festival

The recent release of a report evaluating the Oregon Bach Festival (OBF) has sparked a reflex defense by locals who treasure the 36-year-old music institution. *EW* has covered and praised the festival's many triumphs: inviting superb choirs; creating a Youth Choral Academy; bringing premieres of masterpieces by Arvo Pärt, Osvaldo Golijov, and Tan Dun; and – with a small staff – building a small summer workshop into an impressive two-week extravaganza of high artistic standards and national acclaim. We have also criticized its stodgy programming, a major complaint in the report.



Run by musicians like the superb Royce Saltzman, the festival has always had a great deal of integrity. Now its parent, the UO, should enlist expert musical advisers to make substantive changes in programming, and not merely resort to crossover gimmicks and marketing hype. Here are some suggestions to revitalize our festival that will give longtime listeners, younger audiences, international music scholars and journalists new reasons to attend.

There's nothing wrong with classical music audiences that lower ticket prices won't solve.

- *Get HIP, not hype.* Historically informed performances (HIP) using the instruments and tunings of the period reveal the energy and beauty in Baroque music that have for too long been smothered by bland, bloated performances like Rilling's. Instead of paying big bucks to bring the same old crew from Stuttgart and LA, why not enlist performers who play in agile, transparent authentic styles? In addition to UO professors Marc van Scheeuvenhoek and Eric Mentzel, there are many professional early music performers in Portland and Seattle. If money goes to bring European musicians, why not bring Europe's acclaimed HIP performers and conductors? Hearing the music the way its composers intended it would provide a fresh experience for new and old listeners alike. And the festival could improve its local connections sponsoring a year-round Oregon Baroque Ensemble using HIP regional performers.

- *Make it affordable.* As *New York Times* writer John Rockwell said at an OBF forum a couple years back, there's nothing wrong with classical music audiences that lower ticket prices won't solve. Studies back him up. The festival already subsidizes plenty of tickets, but the UO should increase the subsidies.

- *Put it in context.* Orchestras around the U.S. have enticed new audiences with thematic programming, in which the music is accompanied by contextual material – program notes, films, discussions, art exhibits, dance – that help listeners appreciate the music. The festival has always done some of this but could do a lot more.

- *Bach to the Future.* The single most important thing the OBF can do to draw new audiences and wider interest is an annual commissioning of contemporary composers and presenting other works from the past (from famous and obscure composers alike) that haven't been heard here.

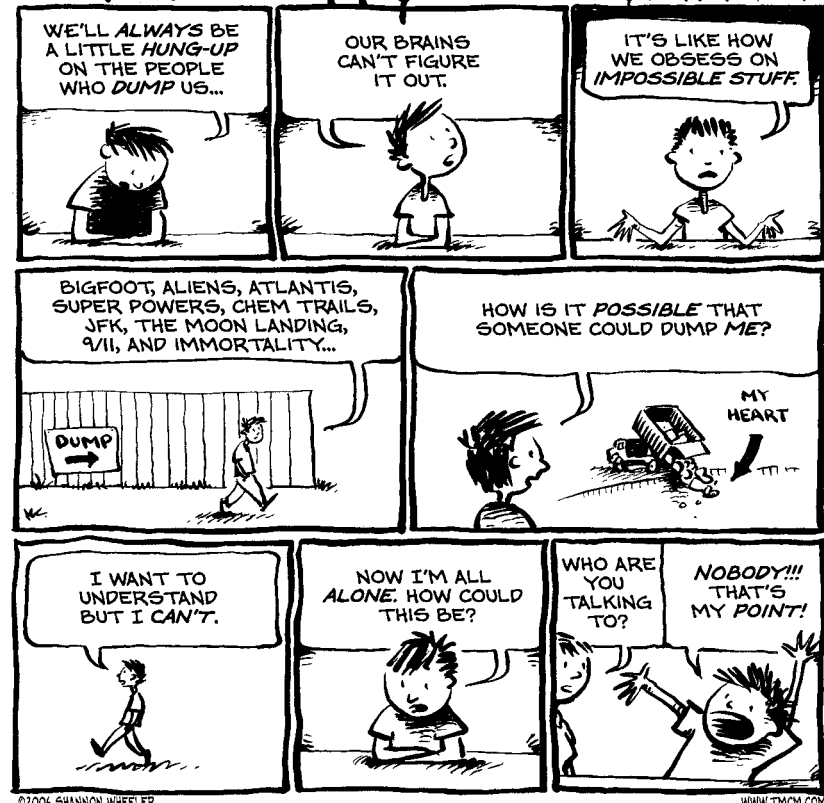
Rather than acceding to Rilling's request for yet another retrograde recording of Haydn masses, the OBF could get worldwide attention by issuing recordings of commissioned composers and newly discovered old music performed at the festival. And some of those commissions could go to Northwest composers, which would improve the festival's connection to its home territory. Again, the UO has resources on campus, such as music professors Robert Kyr and Anne Dhu McLucas, who could advise it.

- *Use money wisely.* Because it performs so many concerts at the Hult Center's cavernous Silva Hall, OBF is locked into high-cost, low-common denominator programming that undermines its educational mission by precluding historically accurate performances and forcing it to program conservatively to fill seats. The UO wants to make the festival self-supporting; to reduce costs, it might consider paring the number of big Silva performances and employing smaller, HIPper ensembles at the UO's Beall Hall, the Shedd, local churches, and other nontraditional locations like malls and community centers – the size of venues that Baroque music was written for. A leaner, HIPper, more intimate and more forward-looking Bach festival could serve the community, the university, and most important, the music better than the dinosaur it has increasingly come to resemble.

Brett Campbell writes about music for EW and other publications and covers West Coast performing arts for the Wall Street Journal.

How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TORREY'S JUST WRONG

When I was chair of the Eugene Police Commission a few years ago, I worked with Jim Torrey in his position as mayor. While I may have disagreed with some of his stands, I thought he was hardworking and generally did a good job. Now, he is running for state Senate against Vicki Walker, and the picture is completely different.

Jim is an anti-choice conservative Republican who has boasted that he is an unabashed supporter of George Bush. These characteristics may not have been too important when he was mayor, but they are very significant in the Oregon Senate where Jim would be voting with the far-right Republican caucus if he wins this election. In the future, he could provide the Republicans with the one vote that would grant them a majority. Such a majority would block any meaningful action and reform from taking place in state government and enhance passage of the neo-con/religious right extremist agenda.

If Jim is so concerned about the welfare of children, has he dissociated himself from the congressional Republican House leadership that covered up for the pedophile member of that party? How about the thousands of children who have been killed in Iraq because of the illegal and immoral war that George Bush has waged? Jim has stated that he supports the Bush/Iraq war. Does he also agree with Bush torturing detainees who have not been indicted or charged?

Regardless of how one felt about Jim as a mayor, his far-right political views and party affiliation should act as an incentive for all of us to prevent his election now. His opponent, Vicki Walker, is an incumbent, and one knows where she stands on issues. Jim claims to be an "independent moderate," but his stated positions demonstrate otherwise. I urge voters to support Vicki Walker.

Munir Katul
Eugene

DEADLY DUCKS?

Because my family is rooted in Green Bay, Wis., booster support for the hometown team

is not only familiar, it's genetic. As an immigrant Eugenean, I love the real affection folks here feel for the UO players and their wonderful coaching staff.

That's why I'm puzzled by the Ducks football billboard at 7th and Washington that says "LETHAL" beside two UO players. Aside from the slang use of the term, we all know this word means "sufficient to cause death: harmful or destructive." Does the billboard somehow suggest that violence at games is taken lightly?

Does it mean, in case of legal action by someone permanently injured during a game, that a jury might award compensation for damages because the billboard gives tacit permission to "lethal" attacks? What kind of sense does this billboard make in a county famous for its gun-toting teens?

Just wondering.

Patricia Burkart
Eugene

PROGRESSIVE TAX?

I am writing in support of Vincent Puleo's letter published Oct. 5, urging voters to pass the 2 percent Lane County income tax to fund public safety.

As Mr. Puleo repeatedly stated, this is a "progressive" tax. It is so "progressive" that whether one makes \$75,000 a year or only \$12,000 a year one will pay exactly the same tax rate. This is a true democratic tax, for it does not unfairly discriminate against the wealthy by making them pay a higher county tax rate.

The tax's "progressive" nature is such that even the working-class poor will be allowed to participate. Only individuals making \$10,000 or less will not be taxed. Well, even someone working full time at minimum wage makes way more than that. Whether one can really live on an income of only \$10,000 a year is truly a moot point.

Finally, well known local progressives like ex-Eugene mayor Jim Torrey strongly support this "progressive" tax. In fact, Torrey has even used this issue to attack his opponent Vicki Walker for failing to support it. And we all