



BROOKS ROBERTSON

SYMPHONIC LOVE DUETS

Porgy and Bess to Miles Davis

On Nov. 23, the **Eugene Symphony** transforms an opera into a concert and a ballet into a play. The inventive show opens with Sergei Prokofiev's intensely dramatic 1936 ballet score, *Romeo and Juliet* — but instead of dancers, the Silva Hall stage will boast a trio of actors from Ashland's world-renowned Oregon Shakespeare Festival who will perform scenes from Shakespeare's play, sometimes interpolated, sometimes in conjunction with the music. It's a treat to see two important Oregon arts institutions working together and I hope this performance, part of the symphony's Counterpoint Festival, heralds future collaborations. The rest of the concert is equally appealing: merely music from the greatest American opera (and maybe the word "American" is even unnecessary), George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. While this concert version, featuring a quintet of vocal soloists and the **Eugene Symphony Chorus**, isn't a substitute for an actual staged version of Gershwin and DuBose Heyward's gripping drama, any opportunity to hear some of the finest music ever written by an American composer is a must.

Nov. 22 at Central Lutheran Church, another concert in the Counterpoint Festival explores similar themes (love and fate), when the vocal ensemble **Vox Resonat** sings several 15th- and 16th-century settings (by composers including Josquin des Prez and Nicolas Gombert) of the myth of Dido and Aeneas, which has produced much great music.

Speaking of great American composers, one of them was actually born in Oregon. Lou Harrison moved with his family to California as a child, and then garnered fame in New York before returning West in the 1950s. He went on to become one of the pioneers of the happy hybrids of Western and Eastern sounds that we now take for granted in "world music." On Sunday, Dec. 1, the acclaimed young **Voxare String Quartet** will perform Harrison's 1979 *String Quartet Set* as part of the ChamberMusic@Beall series at the UO Beall Concert Hall. "The quartet set is a real clear example of how Harrison brought wonderful new influences — Medieval and Turkish — into his work and American music," says David Harrington of the Kronos Quartet, which first recorded it. The concert also features another of the 20th century's finest quartets by another composer known for embracing "ethnic" influences, Bela Bartok's *String Quartet No. 4* and Mendelssohn's *String Quartet No. 2* in A minor.

Another great early Romantic A-minor string quartet, by Franz Schubert, tops the bill at the **Oregon Bach Collegium's** all-Schubert concert on Sunday afternoon, Nov. 24, at United Lutheran Church. Soprano **Heather Holmquest** and fortepianist **Margret Gries** will play some of the composer's songs, and **Ralph-Stricker Chapman** will play his lilting *Arpeggione* sonata.

Back at the UO, the school's **Collegium Musicum** plays more Baroque music (featuring improvisation, which Baroque musicians were doing centuries before jazz) by Handel, Barbara Strozzi and more in a free concert on Dec. 3 at the campus's intimate Collier House. And you can hear electronic music by guest composer **Carla Scaletti** (who's writing a piece based on data from Switzerland's Large Hadron Collider) on Nov. 23 at Thelma Schnitzer Hall, and the **Oregon Percussion Ensemble** performs at Beall on Nov. 26.

Speaking of improvisation, some of America's finest happened in Miles Davis's two legendary quintets — one with John Coltrane, Philly Joe Jones, Paul Chambers and Red Garland in the mid 1950s, and the other with Tony Williams, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter in the 1960s. Between those two pinnacles, his 1961 group featuring saxophonist Hank Mobley, Chambers, Jimmy Cobb and Wynton Kelly (who also played on Davis' magnificent *Kind of Blue*) is sometimes overlooked. Nov. 21 at The Shedd, the **Carl Woideck Jazz Heritage Project** revisits Davis' classic music from that ensemble's *The Complete Blackhawk* live recording. And the following evening, The Shedd hosts another kind of partly improvised music, the fingerstyle guitar-picking duo of **Brooks Robertson** and **John Standefer**, who play music that ranges from jazz to bluegrass to country and beyond. ■

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