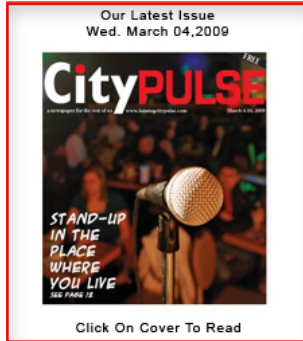




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HOME ARTS AND CULTURE TWO TRUMPETS, NO WAITING

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

Two trumpets, no waiting

LSO goes for both ears with double concerto
by Lawrence Cosentino



Richardson

The prospect of deploying two top trumpeters on the Wharton Center stage for a freshly minted double concerto with the Lansing Symphony has usually unflappable maestro Timothy Muffitt chewing his baton with glee.

"I can't wait," Muffitt said.

It's part of Muffitt's job to talk up every concert, but in three years of pre-concert chats, he has never sounded so jazzed.

"It's one of the most exciting and electrifying pieces of 21st century concert music," Muffitt said of the

concerto by lyrical Minnesota composer Stephen Paulus.

Solid work from Mendelssohn (Symphony No. 3) and Rossini (Overture to "Semiramide") are also on Friday's slate, but the night's main course is an attention magnet for several reasons.

The concerto is comfortably tuneful and romantic, but daringly fresh by classical standards. (It was premiered in 2003). Vincent DiMartino and Rex Richardson, trumpeters with solid cred in both the classical and jazz worlds, will make for an unusual two-pronged attack.

Raspy-voiced Richardson is a widely recognized demon on the trumpet and frequent dedicatee of new works. In the last few weeks, he played tricky new concertos by Dana Wilson in Montreal and a world premiere of a concerto by Peter Meechan in Manchester, England.

"We were really trying to push the boundaries of the instrument, and I felt the pain involved," Richardson said.

By contrast, Richardson said, the challenge of the Paulus concerto is not so much technical as "conceptual."

The concerto was premiered in 2003 by jazzman Doc Severinsen and Manny Laureano, principal trumpeter of the Minnesota Orchestra.

"You have to work on intertwining the two voices of the soloists and getting into the texture of the orchestra, the concept of the piece," Richardson said. "I don't think he wrote it to punish the trumpet players."

Muffitt put the music squarely in the post-modern romantic idiom. "The beginning is almost set up to sound like one player," Muffitt said. "They meld their entrances and move between each other in a seamless way."

As the concerto unfolds, the solo trumpet lines part and merge against the orchestral backdrop, like threads in a big tapestry.

Muffitt called soloist DeMartino, of Kentucky, "a legend in the trumpet world."

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"You have to be an impeccable concert trumpet player, but also have that ability to open up and be bigger than life when it's called for," Muffitt said.

Richardson's love for jazz (a secret in high school) led to a gig with jazz legend Joe Henderson in the last year of Henderson's career. Richardson comes to Michigan often to play with the Brass Band of Battle Creek, a supergroup of top American and Canadian brass players, along with the Lansing Symphony's Rich Illman.

True improvisation happens now and then in symphonic concertos, but on a very small scale. At one or two opportune moments Friday, DeMartino and Richardson are likely to stampede through the usual picket fence surrounding, say, a Mozart cadenza, and go on a glorious rampage.

Muffitt said the interplay between the soloists is more of a dialogue than a battle. Richardson is relieved. "I've done trumpet battles with Vince, and it's always in fun, but I always seem to leave the stage badly bruised," Richardson said.

Lansing Symphony Orchestra

Vincent DiMartino and Rex Richardson, trumpets 8 p.m. Friday, March 6 Wharton Center Cobb Great Hall \$10-\$43 (517) 487-5001

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