



Review: DSSO hits a high point in its season with Orff's 'Carmina Burana'

By [Lawrance Bernabo](#), for the [News Tribune](#) on May 7, 2016 at 10:31 p.m.

The signature strength of Dirk Meyer's tenure as music director and conductor of the Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra has been his ability to make us hear music with new ears. The final educational effort of the season, "Heaven & Earth," was provided Saturday night at a sold out Symphony Hall.

My best evidence for my thesis was provided by the second movement of Ottorino Respighi's "Vetrata di chiesa" ("Church Windows"), which is entitled "St. Michael the Archangel."

However, Respighi's titles are more convenient afterthoughts than creative inspiration, and listening to it live immediately conjured up to my mind a virtual tornado of sound, the horns providing the dramatic undercurrent. A theme reminiscent of Copland emerged, and then a second storm--a thunderstorm this time--broke out. Another theme filled out the narrative aftermath of the rain storm before I heard the sun triumphantly burst through the clouds.

The first movement was highlighted by woodwind cadenzas against luscious swirling strings, the third offered subtle shifts in harmonics as what was played by the second violins and violas moved to the first and second violins.

The ominous beginnings to the fourth movement was rather ponderous before an uplifting theme emerged and grew into a crescendo, which abated only slightly as the theme was developed more fully. The organ reminded us this was all supposed to be about church windows, and then the percussion section gloriously exploded during the climax.

The centerpiece of the evening was Carl Orff's scenic cantata "Carmina Burana." The DSSO Chorus was joined by the University of Wisconsin-Superior A Cappella Choir and the Lake Superior Youth Chorus.

After the chorus delivered on the thunderous opening salvo of "O Fortuna," we reveled in the contrasts between the slow build by the singers against the pizzicato strings and the sonic explosions of sounds. But there is still an hour to go, which is why "Fortune plango vulnear" plays a pivotal part in elevating Orff's cantata. The stark contrasts between the syncopated signing and the orchestra's frenzied fury sustains the momentum of the highly dramatic opening.

Richard Zeller's voice has a tone that evokes a tenderness not often associated with baritones. The dynamic contrasts between his falsetto and his shift to his bass register in "Dies, nox et omnia" nicely captured that recurring element in Orff's music.

The gossamer note soprano Alice Pierce holds at the end of "Amor volat undique" was overwhelmed by the orchestra, but her "Stetit puella" was lovely and its ending was quite gorgeous.

Tenor Christopher Pfund managed to sneak on stage in time for "Olim lacus colueram" (a.k.a. "The Roast Swan"), which he delivered with absolutely no concern for postural correctness, much to the delight of the audience ("Carmina Burana" is pretty funny if you know Latin).

Other standout moments for me were the "Tanza" instrumental, the choir's "Ecce gratum," and the youth chorus's first thrill-of-a-lifetime moment in "Tempus est iocundum." The evening ended with the reprise of "O Fortuna," followed by the most thunderous ovation of the season.

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Before the concert Meyer gave retiring DSSO members Nancy Melander (cello) and Carolyn Carver (violin), a pair of season tickets each that would be good "until you don't feel like coming to the concert anymore."

I doubt that day will ever come.

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