

MUSIC

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'Arc' of triumph

BPO weekend shines light on Williamsville native's composition

BY MARY KUNZ GOLDMAN
News Classical Music Critic

This weekend, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra is breaking out the second half of its Gershwin festival. Pianist Orion Weiss, a hit last weekend, will be back to perform Gershwin's "Concerto in F" and "Second Rhapsody."

The concert will also feature the 16-minute "Arc of Visibility" by Philip Rothman, a Williamsville East grad who now lives in New York City.

The Juilliard-trained Rothman is no stranger to the BPO. In 1997, the orchestra premiered his first orchestral piece, "Overture for Our City."

Rothman, who besides composing works as a music consultant, is looking forward to his trip home.

"I'm very excited because although I've lived in New York City since 1998, Buffalo is still my hometown," Rothman says. "I was born there and attended many BPO concerts as a youth."

"Arc of Visibility" was commissioned by the Green Bay Symphony. The orchestra held a photo contest on the theme of moonlight, with the idea that the winning picture

PREVIEW

WHAT: *The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra Gershwin Festival, plus "Arc of Visibility" by Philip Rothman*
WHEN: 10:30 a.m. today, 8 p.m. Saturday
WHERE: Kleinbans Music Hall
TICKETS: \$29-\$72
INFO: 885-5000

would be the inspiration for Rothman, who was then composer in residence.

"I said, 'That sounds like a great idea. I just want to be the sole judge. I want to be genuinely inspired,'" Rothman says.

Going through hundreds of entries, he finally chose a moody, beautiful black-and-white photo of a lighthouse in moonlight. He also incorporated two other photos.

"There's no specific program in the music. I like to leave that up to the listener," he says. "I like to give the audience a hook, to journey through various winds and weather. I'm not a sailor, not a sea person. I get seasick," he laughs. "But people have come up to me and said, 'I'm a sailor, and you really felt the thrill of being on the sea.'"

"Arc of Visibility" — the title is a nautical term — is as appropriate for Buffalo as it was for Green Bay, Wisc., another port on the Great Lakes. The idea of performing it here, Rothman says, came from BPO Music Director JoAnn Falletta.

"We were in touch, and she said, hey, the 75th anniversary of the BPO is coming up," he says. "We ended up

putting together this residency." Rothman has spent most of the week in town, visiting area high schools.

He likes talking with students about composition. "I've actually shown kids the photographs, ask them, 'What kind of things do you hear?' They're incredibly perceptive. They start describing the piece before they've heard a note," he marvels. "They say, 'I think it would be mysterious and serene, but maybe gets louder and faster ...'"

"Arc of Visibility" begins a varied program this weekend that includes not only Gershwin's "Concerto in F" and "Second Rhapsody" — music being recorded for an upcoming Naxos disc — but also William Schuman's atmospheric "New England Triptych."

The concert, conducted by Falletta, takes place at 10:30 a.m. today — part of the BPO's Coffee Concerts series — and repeats at 8 p.m. Saturday.

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