

Holiday gifts
to their part
to rescue
the arts

By Byron Belt

WHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

The tremendous outpouring of donations to Sept. 11 recovery efforts has dried up contributions to arts organizations — many which might not survive unless support resumes now.

From the greatest symphonic orchestras to small museums in every part of the nation, there is a dramatic need for funds, volunteers, subscriptions and memberships to bring caring audiences into arts venues.

Contributions of money are the obvious first need. Smaller nonprof-

COMMENTARY

Local arts organizations need them most desperately, just to survive. Large organizations are hurting also, but those with major endowments are best able to get rough until matters improve.

While simple contributions are essential, no less important is the need to have audiences return to theaters, concert halls and museums. Music not heard is less than music. The enriching powers of great art are needed now more than ever. They need to be shared by the warm bodies of enthusiastic, devoted audiences.

Now notes

Just recently, New York's magnificent Whitney Museum of Amer-

CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEW

Guest conductor soars with 'Messiah'

Symphony, singers
respond with spirit

By Valerie Scher

CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC

In performances of Handel's "Messiah," the vocal soloists or chorus usually attract the most attention.

Over the weekend, however, the conductor sparkled with star power.

Julian Wachner made a splendid San Diego Symphony debut on Friday in the first of three Copley Symphony Hall presentations with the orchestra, La Jolla Symphony Chorus and guest soloists Virginia Sublett, Doris Brunatti, Scott Wyatt and Philip Larson.

It was quite an introduction to the 32-year-old, Hollywood-born composer and early music specialist, a vital force in Boston's cultural scene before recently becoming an associate music professor at Montreal's McGill University. There was no mistaking his skill and insight during the performance of the 1741 oratorio, which lasted nearly 2½ hours, including intermission.

What made his leadership so exceptional was the way in which his ever-so-agile movements and gestures served the music. Blending scholarship and expressivity, he was an illuminating presence. So apparent was his understanding of the score, and so beguiling his delight in it that it was hard to take one's eyes off him.

The musicians responded with memorable spirit. The symphony's first "Messiah" performance since 1995 was a worthy collaboration of instrumentalists and singers that did justice to the baroque masterwork.

Though the women far outnumbered



Conductor Julian Wachner led the San Diego Symphony's presentation of Handel's "Messiah" at Copley Symphony Hall. Jerry Rife / Union-Tribune

ed the singers — approximately 100 in all — paid commendable attention to phrasing and enunciation, as in the crisply delineated "For unto us a Child is born." And the "Hallelujah Chorus," so often a highlight of holiday performances, was forceful without being bombastic.

The four soloists generally fared well. Soprano Virginia Sublett displayed the accuracy and purity of tone for which she is known. Veteran bass Philip Larson, long familiar to

the audience, led the chorus in a fast tempo in "Why do the nations so furiously rage together?"

Meanwhile, alto Doris Brunatti provided full, dusky tones, if not quite enough ornamentation. And tenor Scott Wyatt — heard at San Diego Opera in April, in Mozart's "Idomeneo" — summoned an almost operatic fervor in dramatic passages.

The orchestra, reduced to about 30 players, sounded appropriately lean and supple, and provided ever-capable support to the singers. Welcome contributions came from con-

ductor Calvin Price. An especially nice touch was having trumpets in the balcony, ringing forth during "Glory to God."

In all, this "Messiah" was a sonorous success, worthy of the standing ovation it received. Let's hope it prompts a return invitation for Wachner. He deserves to conduct more choral concerts here.

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