

## CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEW

## LA JOLLA SYMPHONY SHINES WITH SCHOENBERG'S 'FIVE PIECES'

Chorus complements with a cathartic presentation of Brahms' 'Triumphlied'

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If you are struggling to wrap your mind around the La Jolla Symphony & Chorus' thought-provoking "Angle of Repose" season, Saturday's program at UC San Diego's Mandeville Auditorium should help you clear your head a bit.

"Angle of repose" is an engineering term that could, for example, refer to a pile of dirt; it's the steepest angle at which the pile is stable.

In Wallace Steiger's

book of the same name, which inspired La Jolla Symphony conductor Steven Schick, Steiger talks about the term being "descriptive of human as well as detrital rest."

And in Saturday's concert (which was repeated Sunday), you could hear two centuries of musical detritus destabilizing in Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra, which formed the program's center of gravity.

There are echoes of the old order in the Five

Pieces, whether in the ostinato figures, the occasional sonority containing the interval of a third, or the momentary emphasis of a single pitch. But the harmonic and melodic language that had withstood the buildup of layer upon layer of permutation and elaboration finally reaches its breaking point in Schoenberg's 1909 work. It collapses, leaving in its wake music that has no harmonic center and no extended melodic lines. Instead, it is essentially a succession of tone colors and rhythmic and melodic gestures.

Schoenberg would soon

develop his 12-tone system, which would reach its own angle of repose after about a half century, and then it, too, would give way. But the Five Pieces allow us to hear that moment when the old has fallen and the new has not yet taken hold. It's as if Schoenberg was able to freeze a piece of (what was for him) the present moment.

It was impressive how fluent the La Jolla Symphony was with the Schoenberg work, which scandalized audiences and musicians when it was premiered. The musicians played it with the attentiveness and conviction

they might bring to Brahms, whose music was also on the program.

Where Schoenberg's work was a model of instability, it's hard to imagine any piece of music more stable than Brahms' "Triumphlied." It closed the program that also included Handel's "Entrance of the Queen of Sheba," Brahms' "Nänie" and Dallapiccola's "Piccola musica notturna."

Even a Brahms symphony has some element of doubt (call it drama) to it. But in the "Triumphlied," set to a biblical text (from the Book of Revelations) and written in celebration

of Bismarck and Germany's victory in the Franco-Prussian War, there's not a moment of uncertainty.

There was also little doubt in the chorus's singing, which in the "Triumphlied" was glorious, despite the challenge of being located on the sides of the stage rather than behind the orchestra.

After Schoenberg, the "Triumphlied" proved cathartic, even with the knowledge that the foundation of this piece would not stand.

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