



Classical Sass

Marsalis crashes the symphony, Orthrelm minimalizes metal, and Celtic Woman comes back

by Advocate Staff - March 9, 2006

Marsalis Fusion

New Haven Symphony Orchestra and Branford Marsalis. 7:30pm March 9 at Woolsey Hall, corner of College and Grove streets, New Haven. \$10-\$58. 562-5666, newhavensymphony.org.

Mark Kuss isn't your average composer. One of his classical works, Let's Get a Taco, orchestrates "Harvey Keitel's speech patterns from Reservoir Dogs." Not everyone was in love with Kuss' Oscar Meyer Wiener Variations. Lately he's been buying used computers at Goodwill and mining them for sound files—"weird shit like audio journals, and people having sex"—which he turns into an "audio assemblage portrait of who used that computer."

Now Kuss is forcing a meeting between the New Haven Symphony Orchestra and jazz saxophonist Branford Marsalis. His "Saxophone Concerto" is the centerpiece of Marsalis Fusion, which rattles Woolsey Hall on the 9th.

Kuss teaches at Southern Connecticut State University, but his works rarely get performed hereabouts. So when a piece he wrote for Marsalis to perform with the Ciompi String Quartet led to talk of further collaborations, Kuss called up his friendly neighborhood symphony. He admires how conductor Jung Ho Pak "can be theatrical at the podium, but it's real—he really cares about the music." And Pak was open to Kuss' ideas. Besides preparing his sax concerto for its world premiere, Kuss consulted on the rest of the concert program: Debussy's Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun, Milaud's Scaramouche (also featuring Marsalis) and Hindemith's Symphonic Metamorphoses. "I was really pushing them to do [Stravinsky's] Firebird Suite," Kuss sighs. "My thing is pretty 'Firebird.'"

All along, the composer tried to make it interesting for Marsalis. "He's done experimental, modernist, fringe ... that tradition. With that stuff, the ideas sometimes seem more important than the music. He's a player, so he doesn't like to be bullshitted. So I made some hard stuff for him." The orchestra doesn't get off easy either. "We've got a three dollar bet going that the orchestra's going to crash in this one spot in the fast part. [Marsalis] says they're going down. I say they whup his ass."

—Christopher Arnott

Orthrelm

9pm March 15 at BAR, 254 Crown St., New Haven. Free. 495-8924.

PROMOTIONAL PHOTO



Orthrelm: Undo the math.

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Orthreim's last record, *OV*, represented a major shift from their early recordings—because they started repeating themselves. “All the older stuff is kind of mathy,” explains guitarist Michael Barr, who with drummer Josh Blair is now devoted to uniting (at last!) the musical concepts of minimalism and metal. Before, “every song would have, I’m not sure how many parts, but basically as many parts as could fit into that song. And we would try for as little repetition as possible, so it was kind of a linear, stream-of-conscious kind of thing.”

The Connecticut-born Barr is, on one level, just a grown-up metal and hardcore kid, a self-taught musician whose early bands included a project with Hatebreed's Jamey Jasta. “Back in high school, I definitely wanted to have more slow-like traditional metal bands, sort of in the vein of Neurosis. But over time I just sort of started to experiment with the guitar and playing in the higher register, and I just found it was really easy to learn things that I liked in the higher, faster registers. I guess it would be nice to be able to understand modes and scales and chords a little bit better, but for the most part I've been very happy that I didn't. I feel like, it's just definitely helped me to find shit that I wanted to play, versus things that I felt like I should play.”

Though his work comes across as calculated and “meta,” Barr isn't about to tell anybody else what they should think of it. “I mean, I guess it's just like ... some sort of tranquility would be nice. But it's definitely not up to me what anyone gets out of anything.”

The last time Orthreim played *BAR*, the set was one continuous piece, with Barr playing subtle variations on high-speed licks, the musical tension building and building and building, until it just stopped. But Orthreim's music is also about pushing the edge, musically and physically. According to Barr, “We always try to play as fast and as much as we can, you know, for as long as we can, pretty much until it hurts, sometimes well after it starts hurting.... [T]hat kind of makes it an intense experience for us and for others.”

—Katie Vrabel

Celtic Woman

7:30pm March 10 & 11 at the Chevrolet Theater, 95 South Turnpike Rd., Wallingford. \$35-\$75. 265-1501, chevrolettheater.com

No dancing! That's the main distinguishing feature of Celtic Woman—even more notable than the whole “Woman” thing, since this distaff Irish extravaganza was conceived by its male music director David Downes. Four of the female stars (Chloe, Lisa, Meav and Orla—who needs surnames?) are vocalists. The fifth, Mairead, plays fiddle, as she did on the original soundtrack albums for *Riverdance*, *Lord of the Dance* and *Feet of Flames*. Mairead called from Dublin a few days before the tour began to explain herself.

“It's Celtic music, plus classical music, plus contemporary music,” she begins. Mairead sits in with a band that features two percussionists, a guitarist, a bassist, a uilleann piper, and CW creator Downes himself on keyboards. Oh, and a choir: “There's a lovely set, with projections on a circular screen. It's all done very tastefully. Just nice images in the context of what's happening on stage.”

At first, she says, “we were all thrown into the deep end. We had all worked with David separately—a lot, actually—but we hadn't worked together before. The Celtic Woman DVD was shot after our second performance ever.” Since then, “some numbers have been added, some have been taken away. It's never stagnant. There will be another CD, and another DVD.”

Mairead is recording her second solo album, working with other bands, “travelling a lot” and “taking some time to write music” in between Celtic Woman tours. “I have lots to do, but this is just something that has to be done.”

—Christopher Arnott

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Steve P., 5 p.m.

C.J. Sparrow Pub & Eatery, Cheshire

Moody-Blossom Band, 5 p.m.

Cafe Nine, New Haven

Folly, 6 p.m.

Wallingford American Legion Hall, Wallingford

Apollo Rex, 7 p.m.

Puppet House Theater, Branford

Blended Groove, 7 p.m.

The Space, Hamden

Korn, 7 p.m.

Mohegan Sun Arena, Uncasville

Seymour Bernstein, 7 p.m.

Neighborhood Music School, New Haven

Levine on a Jet Plane (03/16/06)

Recent weeks bring the end of several eras in the news biz. Otis Chandler, Los Angeles Times patriarch, died six years after his family newspaper empire was swallowed by the Chicago-based Tribune Co.

Millstoned (03/09/06)

Birds do it. The wind does it.

Get Reel (03/02/06)

Film Fest New Haven won't have a 2006 edition. The once-annual, once-vital event vows to return in 2007, once it's stabilized itself financially.

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