

## Concert a rousing success to kick off summer season

By Peter Jacobi H-T Reviewer  
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The question is: How long has the Summer Philharmonic been the Summer Philharmonic? The university's class schedule would indicate not for long at all.

The companion question is: How could guest conductor Thomas Wilkins shape an ensemble of such an orchestral unity in a matter of a few weeks?

He obviously is an extremely gifted leader who not only can unite a stage-full host of musicians quickly but also give his players a crystal-clear understanding of what they're playing.

Maestro Wilkins has been here before, and someone wise worked to bring him here once again. As consequence, on Saturday evening, he led the Summer Philharmonic's concert in the Musical Arts Center with great success.

Of course, he brought a rich background with him that currently includes the musical directorship of the Omaha Symphony Orchestra, the principal conductorship of the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra and the filling of the Family and Youth Concert Conductor chair at the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

In addition, Wilkins frequently guest conducts major orchestras throughout the United States.

His program on Saturday included "Preludes for Orchestra," a 2005 composition by Don Freund, faculty member in the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music; a Suite from Leonard Bernstein's opera "Candide" and the Symphony Number 2 of Jean Sibelius, definitely a repertoire of substance and ambition, one of considerable challenges pointing to a truly powerful reading of the Sibelius piece.

Freund's work is an outgrowth of a project he's been building since 1991: to annually write a piano prelude. "Preludes for Orchestra" combines three of those preludes, now orchestrated, and masterfully so, one must say.

The score focuses, first, on the prelude from 1995, "Tune and a half," then 2004, "Second-hand emotion," and — finally — 1996, "Rough, ornery."

Freund's orchestration, from start to finish, is intricate but also catchy. "Tune and a half" reminded one of music by Charles Ives, with rhythms and counter rhythms consistently interrupting one another.

"Second-hand emotion" more gently combines a lyrical melody (beautifully realized by first cellist Jae Yeong Choi with select surrounding instruments) and a contrasting line provided by the rest of the orchestra.

"Rough, ornery" has the orchestra telling listeners, "Anything you can play fast, we can play faster." Together, the three made for a pleasing package; Wilkins and the philharmonic treated the music enthusiastically and skillfully.

Bernstein's combine of tunes from "Candide" stresses rhythms at a gallop and surprise entrances and musical gusto, all of which the Philharmonic delivered admirably well. One was reminded also of the bounty in Bernstein's score.

The Sibelius second symphony, completed in 1902, is one of this reviewer's favorites, not only for its stunningly heroic and affecting final movement, one that chills and thrills with its sweeping and repeated climaxes, but for the Finnish essences the composer built into the whole of this large-scaled marvel.

He may have had his predecessors, Beethoven and Brahms, in the back of his mind while composing the second, but his geographical birthright, Finland and Scandinavia, emerges quickly. Sibelius is himself.

Whether the resultant score was meant to be an abstract canvas or, to the contrary, express the composer's patriotic and spiritual feelings remains a matter of contention not only among musicologists and music historians but just devoted listeners.

For me, it is, truth to tell, simply a terrific piece of music that in the finale raises goosebumps. And certainly, Wilkins' reading of it with the Summer Philharmonic brought back the goosebumps. The performance was outstanding.

The concert gave the 2016 season of summer music a rousing start.