

# ARIZONA DAILY STAR – Accent

## Concert Review (Prokofiev concerto 1)

### Orchestra gives 'Chasing Light' a run for its money

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Civic Orchestra of Tucson associate conductor Robert Bayless had his doubts last week as to whether his volunteer ensemble could make musical sense of Joseph Schwantner's "Chasing Light," the second installment of the Ford Made in America commissioning program.

But on Saturday afternoon in a three-quarters filled Crowder Hall, even he had to be scolding himself: Oh ye of little faith.

Although there were some clunky executions — the brass squealed and the timpani seemed far too forceful, drowning out the strings in the first movement — the orchestra made perfect sense of the Schwantner. It was a performance that the New Hampshire composer would no doubt applaud, especially for its bravery.

The Civic Orchestra of Tucson is one of 65 small American orchestras participating in the Made in America program, which is a partnership of the League of American Orchestras and Meet the Composer. Ford Motor Co.'s philanthropic arm provides the bulk of the program's funding.

"Chasing Light" is a demanding four-movement piece played without interruption. It opens with bombastic timpani, played by Barbara Freischlad, and a heavy burden placed on the brass, which couldn't quite sustain its role. They sounded alternately flat and forced. The timpani's thunderous rumble, which masked some of the brass and strings, was carrying the added load of bass drum. Schwantner's score calls for both instruments to be played with wooden sticks at triple forte — an effect that would have completely drowned out the strings, Bayless said. Having Freischlad play louder was his compromise.

The opening urgency is quieted in the second movement with melodic loveliness, much of it on the shoulders of a clarinet solo that opens and closes the movement. The brass section, whose role was smaller, played with more confidence.

The third movement opens with keyboards and takes its cue from its title, "A Kaleidoscope Blooms": a kaleidoscope of emotions plays out in the amber tones of the music. The violin

section performed the pizzicato passages with crisp fluidity. In fact, the entire string section should be applauded for a near-flawless performance.

By the fourth movement, there were signs that the orchestra was a bit weary. The wind section stumbled over a few awkward passages, particularly in the higher registers, but the timpani was quieter. The players commendably accentuated Schwantner's rich baritone voice.

**Saturday's concert also included guest pianist Aryo Wicaksono performing Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 1, the same piece he played to acclaim last summer with the St. Petersburg (Russia) State Orchestra. Wicaksono performed with technical prowess and studious concentration. He does not try to flatter with showy expositions. He plays with balletic grace, warm tones and an unwavering devotion to the score.**

**Wicaksono, a graduate of the University of Arizona, is a regular on Tucson stages.**

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