



## **CSO honors mavericks of American composing**

**By Keith Powers Contributing writer**

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HYANNIS — As American as Lenny.

It's not likely that "Leonard Bernstein" ever replaces "apple pie" in that adage. But if it did, our national outlook might be more optimistic and open-minded.

Jung-Ho Pak certainly kept an open mind when creating "American Mavericks," a program to celebrate Bernstein's ongoing centennial, with his Cape Symphony Orchestra performing some of Bernstein's most famous works Saturday evening at the Barnstable Performing Arts Center.

But unlike many of this season's tributes, the CSO took Bernstein's own open-arms approach to heart, and embraced the works of other American composers celebrating anniversaries. Along with Bernstein's "Symphonic Dances" and "Divertimento," music of Philip Glass (80th birthday) and John Adams (70th) was also included. In addition, thanks to the expansive influences of William Banfield's Sixth Symphony, a host of jazz greats were also acknowledged.

It may sound like a lot of music, but in fact this was a tightly focused program. The works spread out over a broad spectrum of ideas, but captured essential American notions that Bernstein embodied: ambition, diversity, generosity and optimism.

Glass and Adams represent pillars of modern minimalism. Philosophically, minimalism can be seen as an antidote to the overwhelming clutter of information in contemporary life — much like Dada was an antidote to the brutal inhumanity of World War I.

Musically, minimalism can be many things, and Pak proved it with Glass' "Anniversary Overture" and Adams' infectious "The Chairman Dances." Glass' overture takes an unusual approach — horns in fanfare and martial drums initiate the piece, which then morphs directly into an insistent, straightforward string crescendo, strongly reminiscent of sections from the composer's earlier work, "The Photographer."

In “The Chairman Dances,” an extract from his opera “Nixon in China,” Adams sets an imaginary and incongruous scene: Madame Mao dancing seductively (a foxtrot), tempting a portrait of Mao himself back to life.

As unlikely as that sounds, the music — intense and multi-faceted — brings the fantasy to life. Certainly one of the more difficult scores the CSO has tackled all season, the orchestration is full of rich colors and deeply engaged every section of the ensemble.

Not everything worked perfectly, but everyone certainly worked hard to make it sound organic. Pianist Donald Enos and the percussion section walked the piece out the door with a simple figure, in striking contrast to the complexity that led to that conclusion.

Banfield, a Berklee-based composer, had his own youthful connection to Bernstein, and was on hand to talk about those fruitful experiences. Pak chose two movements from Banfield’s Sixth Symphony to illustrate Bernstein’s influence. The first was an alluring theme-and-variations on Bernstein’s “Maria” melody.

The second, a jazzy tribute invoking both Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis, featured CSO principal trumpet Kyle Spraker and his desk-mate Tobias Monte, channeling the two famed horn players in a smoky, arrhythmic movement.

All that remained was to celebrate the master himself. Bernstein, born in 1918, left legacies as a composer, conductor, performer and educator. Most think of him simply as “musician,” and that serves his memory well.

Bernstein’s variegated “Divertimento” set the stage for an invocation of his most famous composition, the score to “West Side Story.” The “Symphonic Dances” he extracted from that score are a musical trip through the unforgettable drama that musical provided.

Bernstein imagined “Symphonic Dances” as a tone poem — a narrative on the intrigues involved in the battle between the Sharks and the Jets. Pak conducted the piece in that way, yoking the disparate sections — the dream sequence, the scherzo, the mambo, the cha-cha, the inscrutable fugue — into one unified work.

Many, many individual players graced the spotlight in this work: Enos, concertmaster Jae Cosmos Lee, all the horns and percussion, harpist Sandra Bittermann, clarinetist Mark Miller and others.

As the melody evoking the lyrics “There’s a place for us” drifted off in the cadence, nobody could possibly deny the composer’s intention. That’s what Lenny truly believed.

Entertainment

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