

# **JACK NEAL'S**

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# **MUSIC**

# **REVIEWS**

**Music Reviews** | **By Jack Neal**

## **Mar 7, 2004 - Conductor Theodore Kuchar pushes the Reno Chamber Orchestra to the heights**

With a super assist from the superb young American cellist Zuill Bailey, conductor Theodore Kuchar pushed the Reno Chamber Orchestra upward, onward and into a "the sky's the limit" mode in a dazzling Saturday (3/6/04) evening concert before a capacity crowd at Nightingale Concert Hall.

Between a Reno Philharmonic that's playing up a storm with an easily accessible repertory and the Reno Chamber Orchestra that's playing up a storm with a repertory that stretches the imagination, Northern Nevada music buffs are enjoying a symphonic golden age that just has to come close to being second to none.

Thanks to Theodore Kuchar, now in his first season as conductor and music director of the RCO, the orchestra is enjoying a revitalization of spirit and a renewed discipline that thrills at every twist and turn of the enlightened programming he's bringing to the Reno/Sparks performing arts scene.

Saturday's concert was to have featured the rising star of international cellist Torlief Thedeem, who was forced to cancel for medical reasons. It was a classic "into every life some rain must fall" situation. Through what must have been a series of backstage machinations cellist Zuill Bailey was brought in at the last minute to save the day. He did more than save it. No fill-in he. He seized the moment and sizzled his way through two of the repertory's most magnificent cello concertos - Saint-Saens No. 1 (a replacement for Haydn's No. 1) and Shostakovich's No. 1.

With movie-star and rock-star good looks it would be difficult not to like Mr. Bailey even if he couldn't play up to concert-cellist standards. Never fear, Saturday's audience soon discovered. There's no doubt Zuill Bailey is one of the bright stars of a new generation of concert cellists. Playing with the passion of a dashing young man and the maturity of a seasoned and very musical old pro, there's no doubt he's well on his way to a brilliant career.

Bailey's playing is simply stunning. Kuchar's collaborations are always distinguished and attentive to his soloists needs. The blending of these talents was especially suited to the Saint-Saens. From its arresting opening through the minuet with its polished orchestral work over which Bailey floated in a heavenly, serene fashion, to the shifting moods of the finale, the Saint-Saens was a lyric, noble affair.

The program-closing Shostakovich, with its technically bizarre, nightmare-like melodies and overwhelming sense of dread was a tour de force for all involved and a magnificent achievement. Deserving of special mention for the Shostakovich's success was John Lenz's clarion French horn work, which was splendidly brought off. For the cello, the virtuoso aspects of the concerto and how Bailey managed them were nothing less than jaw dropping. The second movement was a thriller in a slow, insidious way. Throughout the concerto Bailey's solo utterances and Kuchar's and the orchestra's responses to those utterances captured the intricacy, the gloominess and the power of the concerto in overlay, after overlay of dramatic texturing that wasn't so much a performance as an inspired happening. Inspired happenings also were Kuchar's renderings of Mozart's Symphony No. 34 and Schubert's Symphony No. 3. Both were far more than exercises in chilly micromanagement, although each work was impressive for its detailing. Kuchar's were revelatory interpretations of exceptional warmth and charm. The Mozart's opening allegro sparked as did the entire work, sprinkled as it was with wit, color and compelling rhythmic drive. Kuchar's Mozart oozed with vitality and grace. As did his take on Schubert's third symphony, which could have danced all night with the enthusiasm of youth had it been given that much time on stage. The Minuet has the exuberance of some of Schubert's best waltzes and it was with exuberance and freshness that it was played. Thank heavens for Maestro Kuchar's young at heart performances. His love for music and his ability to convey that love through his podium and off-stage leadership is setting a standard to which Reno symphony audiences would like and love to become accustomed.

All Reno Chamber Orchestra subscription concerts are played at Nightingale Concert Hall on the University of Nevada, Reno campus, 900 North Virginia Street, Reno. The orchestra's next concert will be May 15 (2004) and will feature violinist James Buswell, violist Theodore Kuchar and the music of Bach, Dvorak, Respighi and Mendelssohn. Kuchar will conduct. For information about the concert and other Reno Chamber Orchestra events call 775-348-9413.