

Soloist Captures Spirit Of Orchestra Concert

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The Butler County Symphony Orchestra carried off an unusual combination Saturday of tradition-breaking French composers and American pioneers Aaron Copland and George Gershwin.

Soloist Keiko Kono Rushlander, the symphony's concertmistress, captured the essence of the evening. She used her violin bow like a magic wand and with polished technique transformed Camille Saint-Saens' "Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso" into an elixir of sweet-tongued, eloquent dialogue with the orchestra.

Her performing style has an interesting visual side. She rises to her toes and tosses her head as she leans into a display of virtuosity. But what was most pleasing was the way she brought precise phrasing and passionate intensity to this concerto known for its design and clarity.

The orchestra's performance of "Ports of Call" by Jacques Ibert was elegant and evocative of exotic travel with its subtle links to Spanish rhythms.

Then followed the hushed performance of Erik Satie's "Gymnopédies Nos. 1,3," featuring solos by oboist Johanna Jackson and flutist William Clark. Originally composed for piano and orchestrated by Claude Debussy, this subdued composition turns corners in a labyrinth but always comes back to one place.

What was most intoxicating was putting Copland next to Gershwin. Both are similar in style — they capture frantic activity followed by moments of serenity.

David Seward filled in flawlessly for Rushlander as concertmaster. Seward performed the solo pas-

sages as did first trumpeter Robert Ficca for Gershwin's "An American in Paris."

The orchestra performed four Copland dances, "Buckaroo Holiday," "Corral Nocturne," "Saturday Night Waltz," and "Hoe-Down" from "Rodeo." The music originally was composed for the Agnes De Mille ballet in 1942, which tells a story of a young cowgirl rejected for her roping abilities by the boys, then accepted as a dancing partner at the Saturday night dance.

The orchestra, with its strong string section, effectively conveyed the contrast of loneliness in "Corral Nocturne" and the explosion into the vim and verve of "Hoe-Down."

Conductor Robin Fountain elicited clarity from each instrumental passage, untangled the Copland themes and allowed them to compete independently. Each theme has a claim for a moment. The music seemed to be saying there is enough room for everybody in Copland's generous world of open-minded space and boundless horizon.

Gershwin has a way of arousing recognition with recurring melodies and elevates popular song into classical music. "An American in Paris," a crowd-pleasing favorite, explores steamy streets and back alleys of a big city and is at moments disjointed, then rescued by the recap of a familiar and transcendent melody.

What better way to spend a musical evening than in the company of this orchestra's scintillating conversation? Fountain does not push his orchestra for massive loudness, but with a brisk baton, colors in a wide range of dynamics. This concert ended all too soon but audience left smiling, probably looking forward to the next on May 4.