

## **Symphony Orchestra at the George Mason arts center**

When asked what his music was about, Mozart is reported to have replied that his music wasn't "about" anything, that it contained nothing but musical ideas. Avner Dorman's new piece, "Lost Souls," given its East Coast premiere by the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra at the George Mason Center for the Arts on Saturday, is about something -- other people's musical ideas, explored in a context of the paranormal.

This piano concerto about piano concertos was written for pianist Alon Goldstein, who premiered it in Kansas City in November (and who was Saturday evening's soloist). For all its kitschy accouterments, it is a **delightful piece of music**.

Its opening movement, "Séance," begins sans pianist but with eerily high shimmering strings. The lights go out, and when they come back on the pianist (the demon seer) is seated and proceeds to summon the spirits of concertos, not perhaps long dead, but at least long ago composed. It is the essence rather than the actual form of the music that is revealed -- a little Bach, some Messiaen, perhaps some Tchaikovsky and Franck (although Franck didn't write a piano concerto), and a lot more. The orchestra, apparently, isn't as sensitive to these spiritual vibes and struggles to stay with the program.

In the second movement the pianist performs a playful concerto movement and a dispirited orchestra quits trying to accompany. In the finale -- "Exorcism" -- however, the orchestra gathers itself for a lively and cheerful chase to rid itself of the concerto demon. The lights once again go out, the demon's soul expires in a high, pitiful and scrambling squeak, there is an explosion from the percussion and, lo and behold, when the lights come back on the pianist has disappeared.

**Dorman thinks big -- lots of notes, crashing sonorities, jazzy rhythms -- and Goldstein has the chops to pull it off.** But most of all, Dorman has a sense of humor that makes the whole undertaking work both musically and dramatically.

The orchestra, under the direction of its new conductor, Christopher Zimmerman, was well rehearsed and did its job admirably. The rest of the program, Borodin's "In the Steppes of Central Asia" and Sibelius's "Four Legends From the Kalevala," seemed in this context high cholesterol and heavy going.

-- Joan Reinthaler