

Brian Lewis

Violinist

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It isn't every day that one gets to attend a world premiere. However, on Saturday evening, the 20th edition of the Sunflower Music Festival concluded with an exuberant program highlighted by the debut of Bruce Broughton's *Mixed Elements*.

Broughton, who served double duty by also conducting the Sunflower Chamber Orchestra, is best known for his career as an Oscar-nominated and Emmy Award-winning film composer. With the brilliant *Mixed Elements*, Broughton also proved himself one of today's most compelling concert music composers.

Taking inspiration from the ancient world's positing of earth, air, fire and water as the planet's natural elements, Broughton blended the basics of the modern orchestra into a tumultuous soundscape of epic proportions.

In *Diversions (Earth)*, Broughton's astringent lyricism let loose boldly dramatic gestures that simmered and seethed. In *Dreams (Air)*, an ominous sense of foreboding gave way to sensations of flying and floating. For *Insinuations (Fire and Water)*, the percussive drive of the first movement returned with heroic upheavals punctuated by a galvanizing rhythmic motive set forth by the timpani.

At the composition's rousing end, the overflowing White Concert Hall audience stood as one to salute maestro-composer Broughton and the Festival's extraordinary Chamber Orchestra which animated Broughton's dramatic vision with uncommon gusto and élan.

Predictions are always risky. However, based on the immediate and heartfelt approval of Saturday's 1,200 music fans, it seems a good bet that *Mixed Elements* will soon find a place in the contemporary orchestral repertory.

Programming Aaron Copland's *Quiet City* (1941) was another masterstroke. Based on themes that Copland originally penned for Irwin Shaw's Broadway play of the same name, the nocturnal cityscape's brooding quality was italicized by the plaintive laments of trumpeter Chad Winkler and English hornist Robin Driscoll.

The orchestra's vivacious rendering of Felix Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1843) was another crowd-pleaser. Anticipating Wagner's heroic use of the French horn, Mendelssohn's timeless airs danced with abandon.

The evening concluded grandly with Brian Lewis's impassioned liming of Samuel Barber's Violin Concerto, Op. 14. Lewis, a former wunderkind from Ottawa, is a charismatic star whose impeccable virtuosity and emotional directness were stunning. Singing with throbbing intensity, Lewis brought the crowd to a thunderous standing ovation, to which he responded with an impromptu version of *The Hot Canary*.

It was a perfect coda for a gala week of classical music-making at the summit. Kudos to all -- artistic director Charles Stegeman, the musicians, sponsors and audiences -- for making the Sunflower Music Festival one of contemporary music's brightest attractions.

Topeka Capital-Journal
June 19, 2006