Philharmonic Orchestra dedicates concert to Phillip Browne

Sean Goodwin, Reporter | Posted: Wednesday, May 31, 2017 7:57 am

The music department’s philharmonic orchestra dedicated their concert in the Music Recital Hall on Wednesday to Phillip Browne, a former music department chair, by playing a composition by him, “Serenade for Orchestra,” to a full audience.

Professor Janine Riveire assembled the ensemble and conducted the performance.

“I was really pleased with the performance. The students really rose to the occasion,” said Riveire.

Browne’s son attended the concert and gave a small speech at the end of the performance, which he praised greatly.

He was also sad to say that his mother, Browne’s wife, was too sick to attend the concert.

Browne started teaching at Cal Poly Pomona in 1963 and retired in 1994, but he continued to teach part-time until 1999.

He was a nationally recognized composer who provided scholarships for instrumental students even after his retirement.

Following his death in December of last year, Riveire started to look for a piece he composed that would be appropriate for her orchestra to play.

She stumbled upon “Serenade for Orchestra,” which ended up becoming the closing piece of the concert.

“We’re still not a huge orchestra. We can’t handle the symphonies that everybody knows because they require a much larger wind section and even more strings than we had onstage tonight,” said Riveire.

“I’ve been seeking out pieces by known and important composers that are maybe for smaller orchestras.”

Although the pieces at the performance may not have been huge, the performance itself was.

“Serenade for Orchestra” was a definite favorite of the night, as proved by the thunderous applause that erupted at the end of it.

Every composition performed by the orchestra that night was composed by an American composer.

Other songs included “Festival Overture on the Star-Spangled Banner” by Dudley Buck, “Theme from ‘Schindler’s List’” by John Williams and “Old American Country Set” by Henry Cowell.

Even though every piece had a unique sound and sounded great, everybody, including the performers, agreed that it was “Serenade for Orchestra” that stole the show.

First-year music student and violinist Ilka Bradvica said, “I liked playing the Browne [piece] . . . and getting to hear the son’s feedback and input and all the history behind it.”

Other pieces performed that night were “‘Intermezzo’ from the opera ‘Goyescas’” by Enrique Granados and arranged by Gaspard Cassadó, and “Piano Quartet in A minor” by Gustav Mahler.

Another unique aspect of the performance was that not only music students contributed to the music. The philharmonic orchestra is an ensemble that any student, no matter their major, can perform in.

Riveire stated that around 20 to 25 of the 60 musicians on stage primarily studied in other fields.

“There are so many people in computer science and the engineering department that play instruments growing up, and it’s really nice for them to have a chance to keep playing,” said Riveire.

The ensemble existed in the 1990s, but it was dropped before the 2000s because the conditions to keep it running were too extreme.

Riveire has been doing her best to revive and grow the orchestra into something extraordinary.

As of now, the current iteration of the orchestra has only existed for a couple of years, but Riveire is hopeful for the future.

The philharmonic itself was a class back in the days of Browne.

“In the 90s, they discontinued offering it because there were fewer string players in the college, and there wasn’t enough student population to really have the orchestra,” said Riveire. “We set about, when I came into the university in 2000, to try to build back the string population.”

So far, the effort has been successful with many students coming forth to participate.