

Revived Orchestra Makes Debut

SYMPHONY OF NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

SHOWCASES TALENT FOR LARGE CROWD

By Kevin Kinder

FAYETTEVILLE — The Symphony of Northwest Arkansas - SoNA - debuted to a nearly full auditorium at the Walton Arts Center on March 17. As it did, it earned several standing ovations and several audible calls of “Bravo” during the course of the evening.

The symphony may have made its debut that evening, but it is not an entirely new creation. SoNA formed from the ashes of the North Arkansas Symphony, a 50-plus-yearold orchestra that faced financial struggles and was forced to cancel a concert in the spring of 2008.

In the months that have followed, the symphony’s supporters worked to retire the organization’s debt. When that was accomplished, the board of directors hired Paul Haas, a Yale- and Juilliard School-trained conductor, to lead the group’s musical vision. He hired a group of musicians for the local symphony from a pool of applicants during a blind audition in October.

Haas, along with Peter Lane, CEO of partner organization Walton Arts Center, spoke with a crowd of about 80 at a Creative Conversation event prior to the symphony’s debut performance.

“When he auditioned, it became clear that there was everyone else, and there was Paul,” Lane said in praise of the maestro.

“We want to have fun, first and foremost, and we want great musical experiences,” Haas said.

For the first concert, he wanted to showcase the talents of the orchestra, he said. He did that through the selection of pieces by Mendelssohn, Brahms and Joshua Penman, the latter a piece called “Songs the Plants Taught Us,” a work Haas debuted at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

At the conclusion of the evening, Haas - suddenly clad in bright red after wearing black most of the evening - led the orchestra in a spirited rendition of “Arkansas Fight,” the Arkansas Razorbacks’ fight song.

A champagne reception attended by Haas, orchestra musicians and members of the organization’s board of directors and board of advisors followed the concert. Many patrons wore green, as the event fell on St. Patrick’s Day.

The symphony hopes to offer more concerts in the near future and plans to announce a full season of events in April.

Lane, speaking at the Creative Conversation, said that season will include three classical concerts, a holiday pops concert and an evening of collaboration with the Fayetteville Jazz Collective.

WEB WATCH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF NORTHWEST ARKANSAS www.sonamusic.org

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