

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

GEORGIA ROWE: CLASSICAL NOTES

Music, visuals flow in concert

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Here's a new concept for a classical concert: The orchestra performs in the middle of the hall, with the audience seated in the round. In addition to music from the standard repertoire, there's a DJ playing electronic music and digital samples of newly commissioned works by contemporary composers. There's a visual component as well, in the form of installation art and lighting effects.

If this sounds like fantasy, think again. It's the program for "Rewind," the multimedia concert experience designed by Paul Haas. And it's coming to the Yerba Buena Center in a performance by the New Century Chamber Orchestra.

Haas, a New York-based conductor, is also the artistic director of Sympho, a not-for-profit classical concert production company. He started "Rewind" in 2005 with the idea, he says, of revitalizing the concert-going experience.

"I was going to a lot of concerts, but feeling that I wasn't as engaged as I wanted to be," Haas explained in a phone call from his home in Manhattan. "I felt there were things that could be done to make the experience a lot more dynamic."

He started brainstorming with a group of his closest "cohorts" -- composers, performers and artists -- to imagine the kind of event they'd like to attend.

"What we came up with was a movie-length concert with no breaks," says Haas. "It's already going on when the audience enters the hall, and it's still going on when people leave. It's a continuous event starting in the present with music written for the concert and traveling back in time through five centuries."

"Rewind" made its debut in New York in June 2005. Now Haas is taking the program on the road. New Century's performance marks its West Coast debut; later this season, it will be performed in Des Moines, Iowa. Haas hopes to share it with other ensembles as well.

Haas, who is in his mid-30s, says he originally conceived of "Rewind" as a program to engage people his age and younger. But it's been a hit with seasoned concertgoers, too. "The more we do this, the more I realize it's for everyone," he says. "I think the vast majority of people are looking for something more."

The Jan. 19 concert, which features Haas leading the New Century orchestra in music by Corelli, Purcell, Mozart, Stravinsky and Schoenberg, will also include performances by Bay Area electronica artist Mason Bates and violinist Anne Akiko Meyers, new works by Joshua Penman and Judd Greenstein, and installation art by Berkeley artist Reuben Margolin.

"Musically, 'Rewind' is a mixture of the well-known and the totally unfamiliar," says Haas. "But the point is to weave them together in an unbroken arc of music that connects the newer pieces to the older ones. You get a sense of borrowing and influence across time; the older pieces begin to sound very forward-looking, and you see the new music as really connected to the fabric of history. It makes the unfamiliar sound familiar in a very exciting way."

The New Century Chamber Orchestra presents "Rewind" 8 p.m. Jan. 19 at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 701 Mission St. in San Francisco. Tickets are \$50 general; \$25 student tickets are available the day of the concert. Contact 415-978-ARTS (2787) or <http://www.ncco.org>.