

At Walt Disney World, they call it the Keys to the Kingdom Tour. For a fee, you get to go behind the scenes to see how the magic is made.

At the Colorado College Summer Music Festival, they call it rehearsal. On day two, I had the chance to go inside the process and to see for myself how the festival fellows (students) ascend to levels that surprise even themselves.

Each having been assigned to an ensemble, given a specific piece of chamber music, and partnered with a faculty coach, it was read-through morning for the fellows. No coaching, just quartets and quintets of musicians meeting for the first time, playing works they never have performed before. The festival's powers that be have figured out this process. When the ensembles reconvene on Tuesday night, their faculty gurus will be present to provide wisdom and guidance.

First stop for me, an ensemble working on *Brahms' Piano Quintet*. Only the pianist had the chance to work the music before this session. But this is what really excites our fellows. A piano and a string quartet ride the composer's rocky emotional rollercoaster of sound. It was fascinating to watch democracy at work. Each of the five players posed questions and proffered suggestions. Even this early in the process, the music was beginning to blossom.

The approach of the next piano quintet, digging into a massive masterpiece by Franck, was a bit different. The first violinist here was Alyssa Wang, back for her second festival and doubling as a conducting student this summer. She also, as I discovered later, will render the beautiful solos for the *Scheherazade* on June 11 when she sits in the concertmaster seat. She took the lead in this group, but, rest assured, everyone had plenty to say.

I also heard a string quartet at the outset of a wrestling match with Beethoven and his *Op. 74 ("Harp") Quartet*. Ludwig might have gotten the best of them on this morning. However, the quartet will be back for more,

and I predict the musicians will triumph. In another room, a woodwind quintet—that's flute, oboe, clarinet, French horn, and bassoon—was discovering a rarely performed 20<sup>th</sup>-century work, *Partita* by Irving Fine. The quintet was undaunted by the work's relative anonymity and teamed up to figure out how to fit together the pieces of its puzzle.

As best I could tell, there were five other ensembles going through the same process. The fruits of their labors will be available for sampling at the free Music at Midday recitals, which commence next Monday, June 10.

This Monday afternoon, the fellows reassembled as the Festival Orchestra, barely fitting on the Cornerstone Arts Center Celeste Theatre stage. These were the forces required to realize Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral spectacular *Scheherazade*.

We've had Scott Yoo as the sole helm of this orchestra since 2003, and the results have been stunning. I always assumed that Scott provided an enlightened learning process for his student orchestra. After observing an hour of the orchestra's second rehearsal, I realize that mine was an insufficient description. Try instead "a transcendent, brilliant, empowering, and transformative experience," and you'll have a better idea as to what goes on here.

So, a note to the festival's powers that be: Let more people witness these rehearsals, the equivalent of going underground at the amusement park. It is beyond fascinating to watch Scott connect with the kids, well, young professionals. So often I've heard wind sections in professional orchestras struggle for shared pitch and tune. This monster maestro got his eager charges to do the work to find the right sound without a single complaint, only a shared mission to make music that soars.

If you've ever watched a professional orchestra in rehearsal, be prepared to lose some of your cynicism. Without restrictions, unions, and complacency, *this* is how music reaches for the heavens. Detect the problem, find a fix, and then shower praise upon the players. There were

consistent bravos for Alyssa Wang's solos. The violins were warned against producing a cat-with-a-shaved-belly sound (you had to be there). Soloists were asked not to reproduce what is on the recordings they've heard and become a "wild man" while facing the music. Supermodel Cindy Crawford was referenced, because her facial mole gives her a signature look, but not a single musician knew who she was! Scott suggested that the musical equivalent of that mole is what is needed to make an individual performance memorable.

Bottom line, the conductor was having a personal conversation with every musician. And another bottom line, we're going to hear some memorable music in the days to come—even if we all don't get keys to the festival kingdom.



