

## Christopher Taylor

Premieres Maxwell Davies with Orpheus at Carnegie Hall

*"a brilliant, energetic account of the solo piano line"*

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MUSIC REVIEW | ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

# Neo-Classical Stravinsky Joins Bachian Rhythms

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Neo-Classicism comes in many varieties, and the [Orpheus Chamber Orchestra](#) explored several in its concert at [Carnegie Hall](#) on Saturday evening. It is a style well-suited to this conductorless orchestra. Though it plays large-scale Romantic and contemporary works persuasively, Orpheus is at its best in music where the orchestration is focused, and the contours are tightly defined.

The ensemble began with Stravinsky's "Basel" Concerto in D (1946), one of his last Neo-Classical works and an odd one. Its opening movement dances along for a while in the kind of steadily bustling, chugging rhythm that animates many works in this backward-looking style. That propulsiveness soon breaks down: the music sputters, starts and stops in a series of fragmentary figures, as if its batteries had lost their charge. But if Stravinsky seemed to be treating Neo-Classicism as a toy he had grown tired of, he returned to the fold in the lyrical second movement and in the brisk closing Rondo.

The Stravinsky, quirky as it was, showed Orpheus's strings at their most finely polished and unified. That unity served the group well in Bach's Concerto No. 1 in D minor (BWV 1052), for which it was joined by the pianist Angela Hewitt. Using a light-voiced Italian piano (a Fazioli), Ms. Hewitt gave a spirited high-energy account of the work, and though she blurred passages here and there in the outer movements, her singing account of the Adagio was the picture of clarity.

The Bach obviously stood outside the program's Neo-Classical theme, but it put Bach's accents in listeners' ears as a way of setting up the premiere of Peter Maxwell Davies's "Sea Orpheus." Part of the orchestra's New Brandenburg Project, in which composers were asked to write companion pieces for Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos, "Sea Orpheus" revisits the Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, with its solo flute, violin and keyboard lines. Other influences include a Gregorian chant, "Tantum Ergo Sacramentum," which is the work's principal theme, and a poem, "Sea Orpheus," by George Mackay Brown.

Mr. Davies describes the work as "strictly Neo-Classical," mainly because it draws on Bachian rhythms, embraces canonic writing and uses Baroque techniques to transform the chant theme. But where Neo-Classicalists in times past hinted at an 18th-century harmonic language, Mr. Davies wrote in his own contemporary style. **It is, however, an engagingly virtuosic score.**

**Christopher Taylor gave a brilliant, energetic account of the solo piano line, and Elizabeth Mann, the flutist, and Renée Jolles, the violinist, played their closely intertwined solo lines vividly.**

Orpheus closed the program with a warm-hued, dreamily paced account of Dvorak's Serenade for Strings (Op. 22), a Romantic composer's loving glance at a late-18th-century form.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/08/arts/music/08orpheus.html?scp=1&sq=orpheus%20+%20christopher%20taylor&st=cse>