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## Concert proves there is no substitute for live music

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The Santa Cruz Symphony presented the second program of their "Exotic"-themed season Saturday evening, with music director John Larry Granger leading the orchestra in works by Bartok, Bloch and Dvorak.

A near-capacity crowd filled the Civic Auditorium, an impressive turnout considering the programming conflict with UCSC's Arts and Lecture's concert by fast-rising pianist Awadagin Pratt — and the World Series' sixth game.

Perhaps the recent problems of symphony orchestras in San Jose and several other cities jolted people into an appreciation of our own musical treasure.

In a refreshing break, the symphony, which tends to rely heavily on favorite classics, expanded the view to include two lesser-performed works, both from the 20th century: Bartok's 1911 "Two Portraits for Orchestra" and Ernest Bloch's 1915 "Schelomo (Hebrew Rhapsody) for Cello and Orchestra." Dvorak's forever crowd-pleasing "Symphony No. 9 'From the New World'" completed the bill.

Bartok's "Portraits," written at age 27, showed the composer's gentle musical beginnings. The two movements, "One Ideal: Andante" and "One Grotesque: Presto," mirrored a Bartok relationship which went from the everything's-wonderful through the breaking-up-is-hard phase.

"Ideal," surprisingly tonal and romantic for Bartok, opens with solo violin stating the "Stefi" theme (Stefi Geyer was the love object, and a violinist).

Concertmaster Kristina Anderson's violin glided lyrically through the flowing melodic lines. When joined by assistant concertmaster John Fairweather, the two instruments gracefully intertwined with perfectly matched tone quality and style.

As the texture grew thicker, the orchestra maintained the harmonious and homogenous sound set by the principal violinists. The recurring theme, appearing in various orchestral voices, tied the movement together.

The second movement, "Grotesque," rang with more of the edgy harmonies and

rhythms usually associated with Bartok, but showed only a hint of the musical rebelliousness to come.

The movement's planned chaos was clownish rather than ugly or enraged — more burlesque than grotesque. The orchestra kept up the driving, energetic pace, as players expertly highlighted and integrated the fragmented phrases that popped up here and there in the orchestra.

Bloch's "Schelomo," essentially a one-movement concerto, featured cellist John Walz. His warm tone gave the cello's lines the human voice clearly called for in a work depicting the inner conflicts of King Solomon (Schelomo, in Hebrew).

Walz made his cello sing with well-matched color and vibrato over the piece's exceptionally wide range.

The cello's lyrical, sometimes anguished lines contrasted dramatically with the orchestra's Biblical epic statements — a la Cecil B. DeMille.

Harpist Jennifer Cass and the percussionists deftly supplied middle-eastern color with subtle but ringing clarity.

Penetrating solos by Dane Carlson, oboe, and Jane Orzel, bassoon, added exotic touches.

While often grandiose, the orchestra maintained balance, never obscuring the cello's lone voice.

Dvorak's "New World" sprang to life in a glorious French horn fanfare, and the horn section continued their starring role through much of the symphony.

Two flutes, each with extended solo lines, gleamed through the orchestra, even in their quieter-voiced lower reaches.

As the work's familiar themes unfolded (sometimes again and again) with the immediacy and clarity impossible on a recording, I was reminded of how there is no substitute for live music.

Granger's usual time-stretched and deliberate approach to slow movements paid off in the "Adagio" part of the second movement. It drew us in gradually to savor the simple spiritual melody, hauntingly introduced by Diane Michado-Wyant's English horn.

The work's finale, taken at a rapid clip, occasionally turned frantic, with a few out-of-synch frills slightly marring the stirring overall performance.

Granger waded into the orchestra to personally, and appropriately congratulate players.