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PORTLAND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA CHAMPIONS A FLUID MOZART

BY JAMES MCQUILLEN, SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Portland's Month of Mozart, the citywide commemoration of the composer's 250th birthday, ended three weeks ago, but you could be forgiven for thinking otherwise if you were at Kaul Auditorium during the past few days.

The Portland Chamber Orchestra put on a long, Mozart-rich weekend, including master classes, chamber music recitals and an immensely satisfying orchestral program Saturday night that showed the ensemble at the height of its powers.

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The concert's first half featured two works from Mozart's late teen years in Salzburg, Austria, a time of vigor, unclouded outlook and mastery of his craft. In both the Symphony No. 29 and the Violin Concert No.3, the PCO put the emphasis on "chamber." The scale was intimate, and their give and take, both among themselves and with violinist Mayumi Fujikawa in the concerto, was simultaneously fluid and acutely responsive.

Fujikawa herself took a more or less Romantic approach, expressively applying rubato and vibrato, but without sacrificing cleanliness or clarity. Her tone was firm and gorgeous, and her cadenzas were dazzling little showpieces.

Fujikawa returned in the second half with cellist Richard Markson and pianist Gerald Robbins for Beethoven's Triple Concerto, an infrequently performed, fascinating hybrid of a piece in which the violin, cello and piano behave alternately like an embedded trio and a set of three independent soloists. The three were perfectly matched, and conductor Yaacov Bergman led the orchestra in seamless and sensitive accompaniment, with exceptionally astute shaping of phrases. This ensemble has never sounded so good.