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## Review: Guest conductor McGegan injects a little fun into SSO's Baroque program

Guest conductor Nicholas McGegan leads the Seattle Symphony Orchestra in a program of "Dramatic Baroque Masterworks."

By Sumi Hahn  
Special to The Seattle Times

British conductor Nicholas McGegan is one of those rare souls who seem to radiate joy. As he stepped onto the podium at Benaroya on Friday night to lead a Baroque-sized Seattle Symphony, it was clear he was going to have some fun, no matter what.

And how could he not? Baroque music isn't all mathematics and architecture; in fact, it's consistently some of the most uplifting repertory around.

Take Henry Purcell's "The Indian Queen." This sprightly 11-part suite showcased the crisp, sinewy sound of the strings to great effect. Almost pastoral at times, these cheerful aires seemed awash in a sepia glow, thanks to Joseph Adams' fizzy harpsichord.

Arcangelo Corelli's Concerto grosso in D major came next, the high point of the first half of the concert. This tiny dynamo is all brilliant, buoyant wind-up in the first section. It then unspools quite languidly in the second section, before ending with an adrenaline rush of dueling fiddles.

As McGegan directed the ensemble, his dapper figure seemed to be borne up by sudden swells in the music. A conductor who not only directs the musicians, he can play the audience as well. McGegan made us laugh with the slightest of prods: a bone-dry comment, a nod, a wry twist of his lips.

In the interest of better proportioning the two halves of the program, McGegan had announced at the start of the concert that the two Handel Organ Concertos would be switched. The F major closed the first half, while the B-flat major opened the second. The latter offered a greater range of sonorities for the soloist, Joseph Adams, from tooting whistles to vibrating blasts of cathedral-sized volume.

Because of the unsubtle nature of the organ, hearing one played in an acoustically revealing hall like the S. Mark Taper Auditorium is like watching a tightrope walker through binoculars: Even the tiniest bobbles become noticeable.

As a result, I was grateful for the orchestral suite that closed the evening. Jean-Philippe Rameau's "Les Indes galantes" was far less nerve-wracking to listen to and filled with amusing and vivid sound effects: violins that trilled as coquettishly as fluttering eyelashes during "Air pour les Amours"; a pair of flutes that winged their way through "Prélude pour l'adoration du Soleil"; a wind machine that gusted throughout "Orage & Air pour Borée."

At times, maestro McGegan would rise on one leg and pause, as if poised to leap up from the podium.

He stayed firmly anchored. It was the music that took off.

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### ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCES 'Dramatic Baroque Masterworks'

Nicholas McGegan conducts the Seattle Symphony, 8 p.m. today, 2 p.m. Sunday. (There will be a session with McGegan one hour before Sunday's concert.) S. Mark Taper Foundation Auditorium, Benaroya Hall, 200 University St., Seattle; \$17-\$83 (206-215-4747 or [www.seattlesymphony.org](http://www.seattlesymphony.org)).

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