

## REVIEW

### Spurned love inspires heart of Mozart concert

- Joshua Kosman, Chronicle Music Critic

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Mozart couldn't get the girl he loved, so he wrote music for her instead and married her sister.

Arias that Mozart composed for the soprano Aloysia Lange, nee Weber -- the object of his unrequited attentions and eventually his sister-in-law -- formed the centerpiece of Friday's zippy all-Mozart program by Nicholas McGegan and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, with soprano Cyndia Sieden as guest artist. The fruits of spurned love have rarely sounded so sweet.

These musical offerings, which include arias for insertion into other composers' operas and stand-alone concert pieces, tell us plenty about Aloysia's abilities and Mozart's regard for her. The emotional range is wide, the writing flatters the singer's technique without being insanely demanding, and there is a certain delicacy about even the most dramatic passages that resonates touchingly with the biographical back story.

Sieden, who boasts a potent tone with some intriguingly dark, throaty coloring, adopted a gutsy approach to this music, heightening the sense of conflict and tearing into the vocal display. If her high notes were occasionally patchy, her coloratura was sound, and she joined with oboist Gonzalo Ruiz in some lovely duet passages in "Vorrei spiegarvi," K. 418.

But Sieden fared even better in two arias Mozart wrote for his other sister-in-law, Aloysia's older sister Josepha Hofer. She was the first Queen of the Night in "The Magic Flute," and the two arias for that role -- famous to

this day for their difficulty -- showed Sieden at her most intense and precise. "Der Hölle Rache," offered as an encore, got a particularly dynamic rendition.

Friday's concert, presented for an enthusiastic audience bundled up against the arctic blasts of Herbst Theatre's ventilation system, concluded with a wonderful account of the G-Minor Symphony. This is familiar enough fare, especially during this Mozart year, but McGegan and the orchestra revealed a wealth of new and unexpected detail.

Especially in the two outer movements, the textures sounded dark and overgrown, like some sort of dense musical jungle, and McGegan infused even the tenderest music with a sense of gritty urgency. The slow movement combined a brisk tempo with an alluring serenity.

Mozart's Clarinet Concerto led off the evening in a rather soggy performance with Eric Hoeprich as soloist. He performed on a modern reconstruction of the basset clarinet, the oddball invention of Anton Stadler, for whom the concerto was written.

This is an extended clarinet with what looks like the bowl of a pipe extended at a 90-degree angle from its lower end; a performer looks as though he should be blowing smoke rings or soap bubbles out of it. Unfortunately, not much of the lower range could be heard, and that's where the concerto's main focus lies.

*E-mail Joshua Kosman at [jkosman@sfchronicle.com](mailto:jkosman@sfchronicle.com).*