

Chamber orchestra shows why Mozart's the master

BY ROB HUBBARD

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Quick: Name a composer of the classical era other than Mozart or Haydn. If no other names pop to mind, that's understandable, since so few of their contemporaries find their way onto concert programs these days.

But the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra is providing a little classical-era context this weekend with concerts that could fill some gaps in your musical education. However, as Thursday night's performance at the Ordway proved, Mozart still upstages others of his era, stepping forward to show why he's outlasted his colleagues on a well-delivered violin concerto courtesy of the orchestra's concertmaster, Steven Copes.

Under the direction of Nicholas McGegan, these concerts are admirably focused in both programming and execution. The influence of the Turks on 18th-century Europe is the topic at hand, with each work either bearing a Turkish tone or trying to tap into "Turcomania" by passing off anything remotely exotic as being "Turkish."

After the overture to Mozart's opera, "The Abduction From the Seraglio," two lesser-known composers are represented by their theater music: Franz Josef Haydn's brother, Michael, with excerpts from "Zaire"; and the "Swedish Mozart," Joseph Martin Kraus, with "Soliman II." While each proved a well-played and worthwhile listen — especially Thomas Tempel's lovely English horn on the Haydn — it was hard to escape the feeling that this music was but one element of a larger entertainment.

No such sentiment arose during Copes' spirited rendition of Mozart's "Turkish" Violin Concerto, the last and most expressive of his violin concertos. The academic air accorded the prior works melted away with Copes' incendiary approach to the piece, most notably in his richly emotive cadenzas.

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Who: The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra with conductor Nicholas McGegan and violinist Steven Copes

What: Works by Mozart, Michael Haydn and Joseph Martin Kraus

When: 10:30 a.m. and 8 p.m. today, 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, 345 Washington St., St. Paul

Tickets: \$59-\$23; call 651-291-1144

Capsule: A fine history lesson, but Mozart's still the star.

Note: Tonight's concert is a "Jazzed-Up Friday" at which the Kraus piece will not be presented. During the concert's second half, a Schubert Octet will be performed while Chris Brown & Friends play jazz in the lobby.