



THINGS TO DO

Macon native leads excellent American program at the Atlanta Symphony



Credit: Courtesy of Rand Lines

Conductor Roderick Cox leads the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. This is the Macon-born conductor's second appearance leading the ASO. (Courtesy of Rand Lines)

By Jon Ross – For the AJC

Oct 25, 2024



It's been 16 years since baritone Gerald Finley paced slowly around the Symphony Hall stage, his face wracked with anguish, a man burdened by the demon of his creation pushing against an eroding moral compass. Finley, playing Robert Oppenheimer, literally spat out the John Donne sonnet "Batter my heart, three person'd God" during the searing soliloquy. His percussive attack instantly became the highlight of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's semi-staged version of the opera "Doctor Atomic."

John Adams' "Doctor Atomic Symphony," fashioned two years after the 2005 San Francisco premiere of his opera, focuses on Donne's poem during the final movement of the 25-minute work. Performed without pause, the symphony translates Oppenheimer's voice into a trumpet buffeted by a disorienting dervish of activity in the orchestra — swirling and disorienting notes marked by crashing waves of dynamics.

Advertisement

Thursday night at Symphony Hall, the ASO, led by guest conductor Roderick Cox, transported me back to that night in 2008. Now, Michael Tiscione played the part of Oppenheimer, giving the poem a more rounded, less aggressive tone. Other musicians passed around key vocal parts from the opera, but the symphony is much more than a summary of the larger work. It sounds devilishly difficult to perform, a challenge both in lining up the myriad moving parts inside the orchestra and the sheer demands asked of the musicians in their scores.

This is the Macon-born conductor's second appearance leading the orchestra — in his debut in 2023, he appeared as a last-minute replacement for the scheduled guest conductor — and the orchestra responded well to his direction.

Cox opened the evening with “Adagio for Strings” by Samuel Barber, signaling with the solemn, elegiac hymn the moral quandary and sadness to come in “Doctor Atomic.” The ASO created the equivalent of an aural warm blanket — a sound well blended and balanced that seemed to call out: “Step inside; feel more deeply.” It was a presence in the hall that shifted and churned below a slowly ascending theme. Cox played up the tension in the work, which peaks with a nearly unbearable cry of pain and longing before suddenly sinking back down into deep contemplation.

Sergei Rachmaninoff's “Symphonic Dances,” performed after intermission, once again showcased the ASO's gorgeous ensemble sound. After a subtle opening by the strings, the first movement came alive with forceful ensemble chords, Cox directing the attack by rearing back his arms and punching the air with both hands. The ensemble then fell away for an awakening by the woodwinds, led by Elizabeth Koch Tiscione on oboe, that morphed into a sprightly dialogue featuring alto saxophonist Nathan Nabb, the new director of Kennesaw State University's music school. Nabb's shaded, round tone blended gloriously with the rest of the section. Brilliant playing abounded during the rest of the 35-minute work, with the ASO sounding in top form throughout the crowd-pleasing and engaging composition.

Get caught up with Today's Top 5.

It's the top 5 stories you need to know each day.

By signing up, I agree to the [Privacy Policy](#) and [Visitor Agreement](#).

SIGN UP

Thursday proved to be an unanticipated but welcome exploration of American history. Long after his exile from Russia, Rachmaninoff composed his dances while living on Long Island, New York; “Symphonic Dances” would turn out to be his last composition. Adams’ symphony explores a dark, pivotal time in our country through the lens of forward-looking, modern American music. Opening the evening with a seminal American expression of tragedy and loss set the tone for a masterful program where the whole proved even better than its parts.

CONCERT REVIEW

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

Additional performance 8 p.m. Oct. 26. \$46-\$119. Symphony Hall, 1280 Peachtree St. NE, Atlanta. 404-733-5000, aso.org.

About the Author

Jon Ross

Keep Reading



Guest conductor promises depth and death in ASO program



Bass David Leigh finding that a successful opera career is no 'impossible dream'



'Ghostbusters in Concert' comes to Atlanta; meet two men behind the music



Finnish conductor and composer Segerstam will be honored with a tribute event after his.

The Latest



Daylight saving time 2024: 7 things to know

1h ago

Daylight saving time ends: When you change your clocks, do this, too

1h ago

'Ghostbusters in Concert' comes to Atlanta; meet two men behind the music

Featured



Gridlock Guy: Weighing major transit votes in Gwinnett and Cobb

One Musicfest wraps its 15th anniversary event with Gunna and Jill Scott

Falcons hold on to down Bucs 31-26 in vital NFC South matchup



About

[Help Center](#)

[About the Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)

[Newsroom Ethics Code](#)

[Careers](#)

[Archive](#)

Contact Us

[Contact Us](#)

[Send a News Tip](#)

[Advertise](#)

[AJC Newsroom](#)

Our Products

[ePaper](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[All AJC Podcasts](#)

[AJC Events](#)

[Download iOS App](#)

[Download Android App](#)

Subscription

[Digital Subscription](#)

[Print Subscription](#)

[Manage Subscription](#)

[Group Subscriptions](#)

[Subscription Terms](#)

[NIE/Newspapers in Education](#)

Follow Us



© 2024 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. All Rights Reserved.

By using this website, you accept the terms of our [Terms of Use](#), [Privacy Policy](#), [CCPA](#), and understand your options regarding [Ad Choices](#).

[Learn about Careers at Cox Enterprises.](#)