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Clarinet soloist, 'meaningful' repertoire open season Oct. 15

The Folsom Symphony's Oct. 15 performance, "Light Out of the Darkness," will be a homecoming with a bit of *deja vu* for guest clarinetist Charles Messersmith.

Messersmith's intricate solo will be his second performance of von Weber's Clarinet Concerto No. 1 under the baton of Folsom Symphony Maestro Michael Neumann. The first was 24 years ago when Messersmith, as a high school student in Neumann's Sacramento Youth Symphony, played the piece to win a youth competition.

The concerto is considered one of the finest pieces ever written for the clarinet. The work demands the full range of the instrument's tone and agility. The other two pieces to be performed are Brahms' "Tragic Overture" and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 in F minor. The latter piece, challenging to play, includes a renowned pizzicato section in which the strings are plucked.

Messersmith and Neumann have not seen each other since the 1980s. "I am looking forward to performing this great piece again with Michael," Messersmith said in an interview. "Performing a great concerto twice with the same conductor is a remarkable opportunity. Preparing this piece has brought back so many great memories of those younger years."

Maestro Neumann, in turn, warmly welcomes home his former prodigy. "I have a lot of very deep-seated satisfaction in having one of my former students come back," he said. "I am able to spot the ones that I feel will go on, and he was certainly one of those. He clearly excelled."

The Del Campo High School graduate had a storied music career as a youngster living in Carmichael. At age 9, he was the youngest person ever to play with the Sacramento Youth Band. In the 1980s, he marched in the opening parade of the Sacramento Dixieland Jubilee. He first played in an orchestra as a sixth-grader with the Junior Music Sponsors Symphony, and in 1982, at the age of 13, performed a solo written for him at the opening of the Sacramento Railroad Museum.

After joining the Sacramento Youth Symphony, he “fell in love with performing in and with a symphony orchestra.”

He is now principal clarinet with the Charleston (S.C.) Symphony. He also plays for Charleston’s famed Piccolo Spoleto Arts Festival every spring and in the summers performs at the Wintergreen Music Festival in the Blue Ridge Mountains. He is a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

In the von Weber concerto, written in 1880, Messersmith’s clarinet will weave between mournful tunes and passages of light innocence. Throughout the piece, the clarinet responds with emotion to various other instruments. A solo caps the final movement.

Brahms’ “Tragic Overture” is a dark, turbulent piece written in 1880 as a companion to a mirthful work completed earlier. One laughs, the other cries, Brahms was quoted as saying. The slow tempo of the middle section is particularly striking.

The Tchaikovsky work, melancholy and passionate, has become a staple of orchestral repertoire despite its complexity. The composer wrote the work in 1877, a time of personal crisis in his life.

“Tchaikovsky had a very troubled life,” Neumann said. “A lot of the music he wrote, including this symphony, expresses very deep emotion. ... But the last movement turns out to be flamboyant and very exciting and not very tragic, and so there we can see the light.”

As a result, Neumann said, “this concert will be very meaningful for everybody who attends, including the musicians.”

“Light Out of the Darkness” is being sponsored by U.S. Bank. It will be performed at Three Stages on the Folsom Lake College campus Oct. 15 at 7:30 p.m. For tickets, visit www.folsomsymphony.com or call 916-357-6718. Email us at info@folsomsymphony.com.

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