

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



photos by Dr Dove Weiland

Concert highlights: 1. On Sunday, Feb. 6, music director Joseph Young led Berkeley Symphony's return to Zellerbach Hall with a program titled RENEW. • 2. The program featured a gorgeous performance by the horn section, especially evident in Sibelius's "Finlandia."

Berkeley Symphony triumphant in return to Zellerbach Hall

BY R. TODD KERR

Berkeley Symphony returned to Zellerbach Hall on Sunday, February 6 – its first live performance in two years. The program was titled RENEW: it was an unforgettable concert, and it all began in darkness. With the orchestra on stage, poised to perform but in very dim light, Mark Grey's first soundscape "Rise Up!" was the first sound that was heard.

Barely recognizable first, it was sound of people...a large crowd, no...a very large crowd, and there were other sounds. There were crashes, cacophony, but a certain directionality. You

could tell the people were going somewhere. They were marching. There were voices too. People were shouting, and chanting... BLACK LIVES MATTER! In Grey's soundscape, one could hear anger, angst, conflict, and humanity...and it brought to mind sound scores of epic cinemas from the past. Then the people in the soundscape were chanting, I CAN'T BREATHE!

Without pause, the stage lights brightened to reveal that Berkeley Symphony music director Joseph Young had mounted the conductor's podium. When his

baton came down, the orchestra performed an exquisite rendition of "Protest" from *Spirituals for Orchestra* by Martin Gould – an appropriate musical response to Grey's "Rise Up!"

Then without pause, the program proceeded with a second, shorter soundscape, "Celebration," that easily transitioned into the orchestra's performance of "As Water, Freedom," a world premiere by Derrick Skye commissioned by Berkeley Symphony. This very layered music, according to the composer, was an exploration of how the sounds of

nature influence group behaviors. What I heard was compelling orchestral music that transported me to pastoral scenes, even grand views of nature...but also to the mechanical sounds of industry.

In its entirety, the arc of this music created something even greater than the four parts – leading up to the orchestra's rendition of Sibelius' "Finlandia," a symphony written to commemorate the Finn's struggle for independence. Though this is familiar classical music, it could not have been framed any better, and the orchestra has never sounded



better. Under Joseph Young's direction, Berkeley Symphony is back...and how!

For those who missed the live performance, an on-demand recording will be available starting February 20. Tickets are offered on a pay-what-you-can scale at \$20, \$35, and \$55. For tickets and more info, go to berkeleysymphony.org, or call the Box Office at (510) 841-2800, Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Mel on Media BY MEL MARTYNN • Good tunes for bad times

The Changer and the Changed – First released in 1975, this album by Cris Williamson epitomizes the joyful zeitgeist and hopeful positivity of the modern feminist movement. With its loving, romantic music and lyrics, it challenges us to a better future through song. Open mine eyes, that I may see, glimpses of truth, thou hast

for me... Love of my life, I am cryin', I am not dying, I am dancing, dancing alone in the madness, there is no sadness, only a song of the soul. Featuring Williamson on vocals and backed up by an exuberant chorus led by Margie Adam and Meg Christian, it became the best selling independent release of all time, nearly 500,000 copies. It's also the first LP to be produced in its entirety by women. And we'll sing this song, why don't you sing along, and we can sing for a long, long time. Originally coming out of Olivia Records, a lesbian collective,

part of its widespread success was this album transcended traditional gender relationships with its playful verses that thrilled lovers – whatever their sexual orientation. Almost fifty years later, listeners continue to identify with the implicit and explicit feelings and sexuality. Hurts like the devil, not having you around, to wake up in the morning, be without the sound, of your breathin' deep and easy, right before my eyes, Oh you left too soon, and I wonder if you were, just a nice surprise.

For those of us living in the Bay Area at the time, these songs became omnipresent, following us on our romantic excursions north to budget hotels in Mendocino, east to tent sleeping in Yosemite Valley, or south to the hot tubs at Esalen. In concerts and coffee houses across America, performances became celebrations of hope and validations of mutual sisterhood. Women were starting restaurants on Ashby Avenue, or their own care repair business in East Oakland.

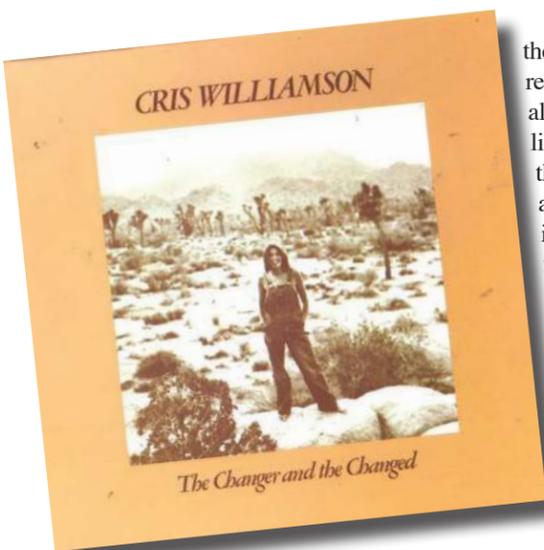
Other singing groups sprang up like shooting stars in the East Bay: for instance, Holly Near and the Red Star Singers. Within a few months, Black women groups were joining with them. Then Helen Reddy sang:

I am woman, hear me roar, in numbers too big to ignore, and I know too much to go back and pretend, 'cause I heard it all before.

Olivia Records has since had to downsize, but some venues from that period, like Freight & Salvage, persisted and remain active to this day, featuring many of *The Changer and the Changed* standards.

A little passage of time, 'til I hold you and you'll be mine, sweet woman risin' so fine.

Mel Martynn is a Berkeley resident, a longtime language teacher at Berkeley Adult School, and active member of Berkeley Federation of Teachers. He can be contacted at mmartynn@yahoo.com.



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