

Review by Michael Beek for Music from the Movies 'The Ring Goes South...' of France

Howard Shore's 'Lord of the Rings Symphony' is fast becoming something of a musical and cultural phenomenon. The six movement symphony for orchestra and choir is now entering its fourth year on the road (it premiered in Wellington, New Zealand in November 2003), so it is little wonder that it's now officially the most performed contemporary/new classical work ever, with performances now topping well over 100 worldwide. This weekend saw a double-whammy as the symphony was performed in both Albuquerque, United States and Nice, France. I was fortunate enough to attend the latter concert which was a centrepiece event for the French town's four-day classical music festival, 'C'est pas classique 2006!' and attended by the composer himself. Shore didn't conduct, but took part in a forty-five minute interview in front of an intimate audience prior to the concert, providing them with some insight into the inception of his most famous music, including the fact that he actually did some of his composing for the films whilst staying in and around Nice and Cannes.

Fittingly for a work that musically crosses many cultural and geographical boundaries, the large orchestra was made up of musicians from two European orchestras, the 'Orchestre Regional de Cannes' (from France) and the 'Orchestra Sinfonica de San Remo' (from Italy). Directing the musicians was maestro **Markus Huber**, Chief Conductor of Leipzig's 'Sächsische Philharmonie' and regular LOTR Symphony conductor, whose boundless energy on the podium was transferred to the players in what was a really wonderful and, at times, electrifying performance. The 200-strong choir was made up of locally based groups and vocal talent and it was clear at times that the complex score was a bit much for them to handle, but they did however pull off a more than reasonable performance in the end, thanks largely to a good orchestral foundation and of course Huber's strong direction. One voice that wasn't questionable was that of **Ann De Renais**, whose crystal vocals brought to life Shore's soprano solos in movement's three to six, including of course the song portions, 'Gollum's Song' and 'Into The West'. Elegantly attired in a dress that wouldn't be out of place in Lothlorien itself, De Renais was unfazed by the demands of the music, which took her voice seemingly beyond its highest and lowest registers.

The work is quite long, with the first half taking in only the first two movements (covering music from just The Fellowship of the Ring), but the packed house didn't grumble one bit and the performers, the conductor and Howard Shore were showered with seemingly endless applause and cheers at the evening's end.

One thing I will take away with me is the power that this music has and the hunger with which the audience took it in; the Acropolis' 'Auditorium Apollon' wasn't just filled with dignitaries and aficionados, but normal people and many many children, most of whom were hearing live orchestral music for the first time, and that is a great thing.

This ring just keeps on rolling and more and more orchestras are taking on the challenges of making music for Middle Earth... Be sure to catch it if it heads your way, check out www.howardshore.com for current schedule details.

Michael Beek - Musicfromthemovies.com