

# IRIS performs new, powerful concerto in honor of rabbi

## REVIEW

By Jon W. Sparks

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Sharon Roffman's violin spoke volumes Saturday night.

The guest soloist at the IRIS Orchestra's concert coaxed a provocative new work from her instrument in the premiere of Bruce Adolphe's concerto "I Will Not Remain Silent." The piece, commissioned by IRIS, was part of the Prinz Project, a remarkable musical and educational effort to honor humanitarian Joachim Prinz.

Prinz was a rabbi in Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s as the growing Nazi movement continued to infect Germany. He was outspoken and urged Jews to leave the country. When he was expelled in 1937, he went to the United States, continuing his advocacy of Jewish issues and joining in America's civil rights movement, which he saw as sharing the same moral issues that the Jews had faced in Europe.

As a friend and colleague of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., he bridged the struggles of the two movements. His example remains a powerful force, and his legacy is something that Adolphe and Roffman wanted to honor.

Michael Stern, the artistic director and conductor of IRIS, joined the effort by commissioning the concerto. But they all wanted to do more, so Roffman, who is also an educator, devised a curriculum that could be used in high schools to teach about Prinz and human rights.

In the last week, several local schools participated in the project that culminated with the performance of the concerto at the Germantown Performing Arts Centre.

The work itself is essentially a musical biography of Prinz. There are two movements: "Germany During the

Nazi Era" and "America During the Civil Rights Movement." The first movement is a deft blend of musical influences of the 1930s overtaken by bullet-riddled violent passages representing the Third Reich. The concluding movement weaves references to songs of the civil rights struggle, with "We Shall Overcome" prominent among them. In each movement, the solo violin is the voice of Prinz, often alone but never wavering and persistent throughout.

It's an intriguing work, packed with emotion and nods to history. Roffman, with her particular connection to the piece, gave it the power and expression that it demanded. You cannot say it's a beautiful work, for it depicts much of the worst of humanity, but it is thoughtful, full of emotion and certainly with beautiful passages.

The concerto was the centerpiece of the evening and was linked to the other two works on the program with a theme, as Maestro Stern said, of humanity.

Opening the concert was Mahler's "Adagietto" from Symphony No. 5, a shimmering, intimate piece that the composer created for his bride, Alma Schindler. The orchestra gave it the delicate and moving touch that it required — a listener might forget to breathe during the pensive, quiet passages.

The finale was Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, named "Eroica" for the composer's admiration of Napoleon, whom he saw as a foe of tyranny. But Bonaparte blew it, Beethoven decided, when he proclaimed himself emperor.

The symphony remains a tribute to heroes generally, however, with epic themes that are sad, glorious and triumphant. IRIS did its part with a glorious, precise performance that nailed the drama and the spirit that Beethoven intended.

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