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CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEW | BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC

## A New Director Open to Adventure and a Challenge

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The Brooklyn Philharmonic opened its 51st season on Saturday evening, with its new music director, Michael Christie, on its podium. Mr. Christie has his work cut out for him. His predecessor in Brooklyn, Robert Spano, conducted each of his programs twice, and before Mr. Spano, Dennis Russell Davies led weekend thematic extravaganzas. Now the orchestra's parlous finances cover only single performances. Clearly it is up to Mr. Christie to create an excitement that will attract audiences and money to make expansion — or reclamation — possible.

He is off to a good start. His programming for the season is fresh and adventurous, and he has made himself as accessible as can be. On Saturday he gave a preconcert lecture, offered remarks between two of the works, and returned to the stage to field audience questions after the performance. That practice, apparently, will be standard.

His inaugural program was properly festive. Its main draw was Orff's splashy "Carmina Burana," for which the orchestra commissioned new choreography from Nicholas Leichter. It also solicited a curtain-raiser from John Corigliano, who had the inspired idea of writing a short, rhythmically and contrapuntally lively fanfare for a kazoo ensemble placed in the balconies and along the aisles downstairs, with occasional punctuation from brass and percussion on the stage.

The first half of the program was otherwise devoted to Stravinsky's compact "Symphonies of Wind Instruments" (1920) and Philip Glass's "Hymn to Aten," from his 1984 opera, "Akhnaten." A touch of raggedness at the start of the Stravinsky was quickly corrected in a performance that was zesty and focused. And if the ensemble wanted greater lushness in the Glass, the strings contributed an appealing suppleness, and Daniel Taylor, a countertenor, sang the vocal line with a pleasingly rich timbre and sufficient power.

"Carmina Burana," Orff's 1934 setting of bawdy medieval poetry, is a musical comic book, couched in bright hues and exclamation points, with a text made for dialogue bubbles. Mr. Leichter's choreography was in that spirit. Kinetic and sometimes almost mechanistic, but just as often the picture of fluid physicality, it was about movement on its own terms rather than as an interpretation of the text.

Mr. Christie drew an energetic performance from his players, who were mostly (but for two pianos and the percussionists) in the pit, having ceded the stage to Mr. Leichter's troupe, Nicholasleichterdance and the massed voices of the New York Virtuoso Singers, the Canticum Novum Singers, Westchester Oratorio Society, University of Buffalo Chorus and Choir, and Brooklyn Youth Chorus. Stephen Powell sang the solo baritone music excitingly, and Mr. Taylor and Hanan Alattar, a soprano, made lovely contributions as well.

Photo of Michael Christie, the new music director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic, by Rahav Segev