



## The Birmingham News

### BSC musicians help celebrate 150 years

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**MICHAEL HUEBNER**

News staff writer

What started as an academic vision by Methodist reformers 150 years ago in Greensboro took flight Sunday in a grand musical celebration.

A packed house at the Alys Stephens Center helped mark Birmingham-Southern College's sesquicentennial with a concert by the Alabama Symphony Orchestra. But instead of ASO taking the spotlight, the event showcased the talent of BSC's own musicians. And clearly, there's plenty of talent in BSC's Music Department, not surprising given its origins as the Birmingham Conservatory of Music and 71 years of accreditation.

Though small in numbers, the faculty boasts a former Metropolitan Opera soprano, a Rome Prize-winning composer and an internationally known pianist. And that's just for starters.

After opening remarks from BSC President David Pollick, the music began with a world premiere by Charles Norman Mason, who took time off from his obligations in Rome to attend the event. "Fanfare for Human Dignity," inspired by the convictions of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr., is appropriately bold, gritty and forceful. Its meaty musical language, at times brash, other times gentle, vividly reflects the personal and political struggles of King and Mandela. Flurries of brass staccato notes, a colorful palette of percussion and edge-of-your-seat rhythms created the tension. A sigh at the work's end provided the release. The orchestra wasn't always up to its technical demands, so let's hope it gets another hearing.

Another BSC composer, Mason's wife Dorothy Hindman, presented her colorfully orchestrated, rhythmically playful "Streaming," a movement from a larger work composed in 1999.

First lady Karen Bentley Pollick soloed in a performance of Sibelius' Violin Concerto that never connected with conductor Thomas Gibbs and the orchestra. Although Pollick has impressive solo credentials, in this performance she struggled with pitch and with the work's difficult arpeggios and double stops.

The festive occasion reached a glorious conclusion as pianist William DeVan, six student vocal soloists and two BSC choirs combined with the orchestra for Beethoven's "Choral Fantasia." Conductor Lester Seigel brought power and spirit to this joyful work, tenors Patrick Scott and Michael Seward adding a degree of youthful buoyancy.

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