

Rousing debut

Meyer wraps successful first season with Erie Phil

By **DAN MOREY**
Contributing writer

Daniel Meyer's first season as music director of the Erie Philharmonic came to a jubilant close on April 5 with a sparkling rendition of the "Drinking Song" from "La Traviata."

It was a fitting finale for the conductor who kicked things off with such a bang at the Erie Heritage Festival in 2007.

Anyone who witnessed his (literally) explosive 1812 Overture that night knew Erie was in for a conductor of another color.

Meyer's predecessor, Hugh Keelan, was an affable Brit with an air of comedy about him — ever charming, even under duress. Who can forget his endearing battle with that unruly cummerbund? Or his delightful turn as Henry Higgins at the Playhouse?

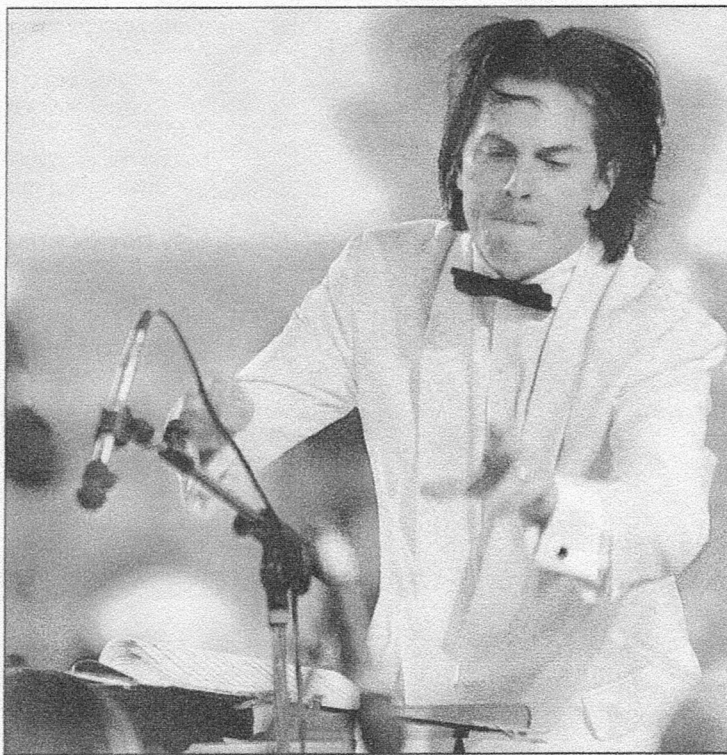
Meyer gives a distinctly different impression on the podium. With his flowing Franz Liszt locks and passionate energy, he seems a throwback to the Romantic era.

He was, perhaps, most in his element on the night of the March 8 blizzard. Outside, snow fell in blinding sheets from the thunderous sky.

Inside, Meyer conducted Mendelssohn's turbulent Scottish Symphony. As the orchestra played, winter's fury seemed to gust into the theater. The conductor raged — a windblown helmsman on the roiling Hebridean Sea.

Meyer brings an exciting, galvanizing power to the Philharmonic — not surprising when you consider that his other job is resident conductor of the perennially anabolic Pittsburgh Symphony. His Bartok Concerto for Orchestra in January pulsed with all the flash and vigor of unbridled youth.

Though the Erie Phil was noticeably more muscled this season, it managed to retain the delicacy required to accompany vocalists and choirs — an area where Keelan excelled and where Meyer, as evidenced by April 5's operatic program, is equally comfortable. His control of two choruses, a sextet and the



ROB ENGELHARDT/Erie Times-News

Daniel Meyer conducts the Erie Philharmonic at the Erie Heritage Festival, the unofficial start of his debut season.

Review

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Erie Philharmonic's regular symphonic season is over, but the orchestra has a special treat in store.

Daniel Meyer will conduct the Philharmonic in the Family Discovery Concert "Beethoven Lives Upstairs" on April 26 at 4 p.m. at the Warner Theatre, 811 State St. Pre-concert activities will begin at 3 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$8 for children.

For tickets, call 455-1375, Ext. 4 or visit www.eriephil.org.

orchestra in selections from Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor" was as breathtaking as it was precise.

He's also perfectly at home with virtuoso concertos. In September, guest pianist Angela Cheng slipped seamlessly into the orchestra for Rachmaninoff's 2nd Piano Concerto. It

was a great success, but Meyer didn't stop there. Six months later, he doubled down and tried his luck with not one but two pianists in the Mozart Concerto for Two Pianos, K. 365.

Though he spent most of the performance obscured behind the hulking Grands, his gamble paid off, and the elegant Naughton twins, Christina and Michelle, thrilled the audience with their telepathic talent.

The season's programming featured an abundance of familiar names, but Meyer has an avowed interest in new composers as well. Now that he's established his footing with a strong first series, more progressive fare should follow.

What can we expect in years to come? Well, Meyer has pledged allegiance to His Purple Majesty, Prince, on numerous occasions. Could an orchestral treatment of "Sign o' the Times" be in Erie's future?

Here's hoping.

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