Symphony concludes season with magical choral concert

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What a wonderful way to conclude the second year of Daniel Stewart’s appointment as conductor of the Santa Cruz Symphony. Welcoming the packed audience last Saturday, Stewart reminded us that this orchestra is now in its 57th season and the performance at the Civic Auditorium was energy-filled, precise and highly entertaining. The concert was dedicated to the memory of Jane Ozel, the orchestra’s principal bassoonist who passed away unexpectedly last month.

The last concert of the season has traditionally combined the orchestra with a choral group and more than 70 voices from the Cabrillo chorus along with the youth chorus were on stage for an outstanding production of the ever-popular “Carmina Burana.”

The chorus appeared to be a rollicking good time, attired in Turkish costumes and garlands following their dramatic entrance from all aisles for the opening “March Pour A Cérémonie Des Turcs,” Jean-Baptiste Lully’s Turkish march from his comédie-ballet commissioned by none other than the dancing Sun King, Louis XIV. The chorus interacted with the audience, coyly bestowing flowers and showering with rose petals those people sitting close enough to receive them. It was all very festive.

In the fall of 2012, maestro Stewart was appointed by James Levine as conductor with the Metropolitan Opera’s Lindemann Young Artist Development Program and several of Stewart’s concerts in Santa Cruz have featured these rising stars of opera. On the program this weekend were three outstanding vocalists, soprano Nadine Sierra, tenor Anthony Roth Costanzo and baritone John Moore. Handel’s opera “Rodelinda,” written in 1719, contains some of his most ravishing music, and perhaps the most enchanting moment occurs at the end of Act two with the duet “Io l’abbraccio,” Sierra and Costanzo took the line, “I embrace you” literally at the opening of their number, which drew some amused reaction in the audience but without this the lyrics appear absurd. It’s the simplicity of this duet with its fulling vocal lines that makes it so effective. Their voices were beautifully matched and the result was quite magical. Stewart demonstrated great sensitivity in maintaining the balance between the impor-