

# Orchestra brings back 'Carmina Burana'

By **MICHAEL HUEBNER**

*News staff writer*

Nearly eight years have passed since fortune last visited the Alabama Symphony with "Carmina Burana," just about the right interval to bask in its guilty pleasures.

On Friday, a nearly full house at the Alys Stephens Center heard an artfully sculpted reading of Carl Orff's secular oratorio that brought 250 musicians to the stage and choral balcony. An effort that combined five choirs and a small army of extras to the orchestra, it reaped the power, joy, delicacy, lust, love and bawdiness of this familiar score, at the same bringing the community together.

At the helm was ASO Music Director Justin Brown, conducting without a score, his arms often driving cues like a propeller. He was confident and commanding, at times narrowing the focus of the large forces to chamber music proportions. "O Fortuna" built intensity in a slow simmer. "Tanz" was filled with rhythmic vitality. The wall of choral sound at the work's beginning and end wasn't just loud, it had character. Likewise, brass and percussion sections turned in balanced and full-bodied, but not deafening, performances.

No "Carmina" performance could work without a good baritone soloist, and Leon Williams fit the bill, not only for his pure, rounded voice, but for his dramatic expression and engaging humor in tavern and love songs. Ilana Armstrong, a light soprano with a sweet tone, sang beautifully in "Steti Puella," though she occasionally could get lost under the orchestra. Tenor Steven Stolen hammed it up with his crackling falsetto and drunken musings. The Birmingham Boys Choir added a touch of tenderness in "Amor Volat Undique."

Not to be overlooked was Zoltan Kodaly's "Hary Janos" Suite, which started the program. Punctuated by fine solos on viola, cimbalom and clarinet, it ranged from a sweet and serene "Song" to a rambunctious Hungarian dance in "Intermezzo."

★★★★★

## **ALABAMA SYMPHONY**

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Justin Brown,  
conductor

Ilana Davidson,  
soprano

Leon Williams,  
baritone

Steven Stolen,  
tenor

Birmingham  
Concert  
Chorale

Birmingham  
Boys Choir

Choirs from  
Birmingham-  
Southern  
College,  
Samford

University and  
University of  
Montevallo

Friday  
Alys Stephens  
Center  
Repeats today  
at 8 p.m.

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