Area orchestras forging ahead in 2010-11 despite shaky economy
By John von Rhein
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The sputtering economy does not appear to have seriously dampened the artistic plans of Chicago-area classical music organizations. If anything, city and suburban symphony orchestras are adopting a full-speed-ahead stance, as their programs for the upcoming season suggest.

Approachability is the buzzword at the Ars Viva Symphony. The orchestra under Alan Heatherington will begin its five-concert season Oct. 24 with a centenary salute to Samuel Barber and a new suite from "Fiddler on the Roof" arranged by John Williams. Rarely-heard symphonies by Schumann and Sibelius figure prominently in programs later in the season. All concerts will take place at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie.

Several orchestras are luring audiences with comforting doses of Brahms. Both Ars Viva and the Northbrook Symphony conducted by Lawrence Rapchak are performing the composer's delightful serenades: Heatherington will conduct Serenade No. 1 on Dec. 5, and Rapchak will present Serenade No. 2 in April, also the seldom-performed choral gem "Nanie" on Nov. 7. Kirk Muspratt will lead his Glen Ellyn-based New Philharmonic in Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 1 and Symphony No. 2 in April.

Kicking off Paul Freeman's final season as music director of the Chicago Sinfonietta will be a program saluting working men and women; an ensemble of Japanese drummers and guest conductor Harvey Felder will take part in concerts Oct. 3 at Dominican University in River Forest and Oct. 4 at Symphony Center.

The sinfonietta also will commemorate the Mexican Day of the Dead with a special concert co-directed by Hector Guzman on Oct. 30 at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance.

Another dynamic local orchestra, the period-instrument ensemble Baroque Band, launches another packed season with concerts Oct. 8-13 comprising works by the Italian Baroque masters Locatelli and Tartini; programs again will be given in Hyde Park, Evanston and downtown Chicago locations.

Sharps and flats

The William Ferris Chorale is the newest artist-in-residence at Loyola University Chicago. The appointment, effective this summer, will allow students to observe the operation of a professional choral ensemble through open rehearsals and internships … The Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras and the Fulcrum Point New Music Project recently won ASCAP awards for adventurous programming last season.

Area music lovers who frequent Wisconsin's Door County know that good things await at the Peninsula Music Festival, which runs to Aug. 21 in Door Community Auditorium, Fish Creek.

CD of the week


Thomas Larcher's music delights in violent contrasts, abrupt shifts of style and loose, almost improvisatory structures. These three works by the 46-year-old Austrian composer stake out intriguing new tonal and atonal territory and compel you to go exploring.

The meditative stillness of "Still," a viola concerto at times reminiscent of Arvo Part's elegiac minimalism is disturbed by jolts of orchestral noise, like electrical storms bursting across a tranquil landscape. The companion works are hardly less absorbing. Superb performances from violist Kim Kashkashian, pianist Till Fellner, Quatuor Diotima and the Munich Chamber Orchestra under Dennis Russell Davies.