

## CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEW

# Underdogs had their days in Mainly Mozart's 15th year

By Valerie Scher  
CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC

The Mainly Mozart Festival's 15th season, which closed over the weekend, presented 19 performances over 24 days in nine locations in San Diego County and Baja California.

The season was especially sympathetic to musical underdogs — instruments that are rarely called upon to be orchestra soloists. Given a chance were the harp (as played by the nimble-fingered Jessica Li Zhou) as well as the oddly shaped alphorn, which received expert treatment from Carlo Tortolontano.

Saturday at downtown's Spreckels Theatre, during the festival's final orchestra concert, the doublebass took the starring role in Dittersdorf's Concerto in E Major. Though more often banal than brilliant, the 18th-century score allowed Timothy Pitts — principal bass of the Houston Symphony — to

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demonstrate his dexterity with the largest and lowest-pitched member of the string family.

Baroque and classical pieces made up the bulk of the festival, which closed with chamber music Sunday. Yet it was one of Mainly Mozart's rare 20th-century works — Stravinsky's "Dumbarton Oaks Concerto"

— that prompted one of the finest performances.

Conductor David Atherton, the festival's founder, has long been known as a superb Stravinsky interpreter, and his powers were in full evidence last Wednesday at the Spreckels. Working with such exceptional former San Diego Symphony musicians as concertmaster Andres Cardenes (now with the Pittsburgh Symphony) and French horn player Jerry Folsom (a Los Angeles Philharmonic principal), the 59-year-old Englishman brought forth the spirited rhythms and neo-baroque complexity of "Dumbarton Oaks," named for the Washington, D.C., estate of the arts patrons who commissioned the work in 1937.

Still, Mozart is the heart and soul of the festival. And there was much to savor during Saturday's program, which was also heard Friday at the Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT).

Atherton led a spirited and beautifully shaped performance

of Mozart's Symphony No. 39 in E-Flat Major, K. 543 — a work that far surpassed the concert's so-so Serenade in B-Flat Major by Antonio Salieri, Mozart's archrival.

Pianist Christopher O'Riley was the ever-sensitive soloist in Mozart's Piano Concerto in E-Flat Major, K. 482. Though not your typical concert pianist —