

# Frost Symphony Orchestra hits the dance floor, from Beethoven to Hindman

By Lawrence Budmen



Thomas Sleeper conducted the Frost Symphony Orchestra in Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 Saturday night.

The rhythm of the dance formed the unifying musical ground in works by Beethoven, Dorothy Hindman and Roberto Sierra at the Frost Symphony Orchestra's concert on Saturday night. No less than three conductors shared the UM Gusman Hall podium in an impressive demonstration of the student ensemble's polish and versatility.

Wagner called Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 "the apotheosis of the dance" and Thomas Sleeper led the score with unflagging momentum. Sleeper has always been an excellent Beethoven conductor but this performance was one of his finest achievements. Throughout the symphony's four movements, there was wonderful clarity of instrumental detail even at the most vigorous pace. The transition from the slow introduction to the buoyant Vivace of the first movement was smoothly coordinated. Sleeper shaped the melody

of the famous Allegretto in one long arc without succumbing to the temptation to make the movement sound funereal. He drew a full, rich sound from the ensemble's lower strings, particularly the violas. The violin lines were always audible over the full instrumental forces.

The third movement Presto took off at a breakneck clip but corporate precision remained cohesive. In the trio section, the tricky horn parts were vociferous and spot on. The final movement was Allegro con brio indeed, with Sleeper pushing the rhythm forward to the final pages. A brief wrong entrance did not diminish an outstanding performance that was true to Beethoven's masterful synthesis of inspired melody, dance like impetuosity and symphonic form.

The genesis of *Setting Century* by Frost faculty member Dorothy Hindman was a 1999 chamber work. This revised orchestral version received its premiere in an incisive performance conducted by Alexander Magalong who is studying for his master's degree under Sleeper. Hindman's three-movement suite is ingeniously crafted. The score is an imaginative essay in orchestral rhythm and color. The initial section "Ticking" is based on a brief, repeated figure in the violins, like the machinery of a clock. Gradually larger melodic threads emerge. The piano imitates bells over long string lines in "Tolling." As the winds and strings branch out to broader, more complex patterns, the overall effect is powerful. Dance-like themes give the

entire orchestra a good workout in “Streaming,”. An extended episode for winds exploits the individual instruments’ timbres in striking fashion. Hindman could not have wished for a better performance, with Magalong keeping the ensemble playing tight and crisp. Special kudos to Rosangel Perez for a brilliant traversal of the extended piano part.

Latin dance rhythms permeate Roberto Sierra’s Symphony No. 3 (“La Salsa”) which closed the program in high-spirited fashion. The score is great light concert fare with its suggestions of Caribbean-flavored percussion and snappy big band tunes. There are more layered textures and florid wind patterns in the “Habanera.” A violent, dissonant segment briefly interrupts the second movement before the score returns to its joyous tread. The beat of the percussion battery in the final “Jolgorio” is an intoxicating undertow for bouncy melodies. Sleeper was on top of the varied changes of meter and also brought out the work’s darker contours. The players responded with a superbly articulated reading.

Sleeper presented the second annual Frost Symphony Music Educator Award to Mark Thielen. Thielen is a violinist, conductor and educator who recently retired from teaching positions at Harrison School of the Arts in Lakeland and All Saints’ Academy in Winter Haven. Sleeper noted that Thielen’s student ensembles consistently won top honors in statewide competitions.

The program opened with Thielen leading a full-throttle reading of Sibelius’ *Finlandia*. He underlined the bass line in a tautly shaped performance and never allowed the hymn melody to plod or lose focus. Drawing firm brass and wind articulation and a large string sonority, Thielen amply demonstrated that he is an inspiring teacher and mentor to young musicians.

**Thomas Sleeper conducts the Frost Symphony Orchestra in Brahms’ Symphony No. 1 and Piano Concerto No. 1 with soloist Simone Dinnerstein 8 p.m. November 12 at UM Gusman Hall in Coral Gables [music.miami.edu](http://music.miami.edu); 305-284-2400.**

Posted in [Performances](#)