

2013 Review of  
Debussy's "The Sirens"

# Symphony a lesson in symbiosis

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"Symbiosis: the intimate living together of two dissimilar organisms in a mutually beneficial relationship."

In its season-closing performance on Saturday at the Saenger Theatre, the Pensacola Symphony Orchestra and its Music Director/Conductor Peter Rubardt unequivocally demonstrated why that word applies to all successful orchestras.

Relationships make great music between many sounding instruments, conductor and musicians, orchestra and audience — and vital elements sometimes overlooked between pieces performed at a concert, forming a season's arc. Rubardt excels at all of these, coaxing, explaining, charming, sharing his knowledge and insight indefatigably, on every level.

If proof was needed, the dazzling assemblage of works on Saturday evening should suffice. Richard Wagner's "Prelude" and "Liebestod" from his opera Tristan and Isolde, three nocturnes from Claude Debussy ("Clouds," "Festivals" and "Sirens"), and following intermission, Igor Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" and "Le Sacre du Printemps."

In the progress of their composition (respectively, 1865, 1901, 1913) the onward march of modernism resounds. Wagner pushed Romanticism to its limit, then back, Debussy forged his own new path, impressionism. And Stravinsky — as Rubardt himself has written — "swept away centuries of musical development and launched an era of musical Modernism."

The evening's scale was apparent when the lights went up on stage: the largest gathering of

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instruments in memory confronted the audience — a number augmented further by the UWF Women's Chorus, who hauntingly, flawlessly contributed to Debussy's "Sirens."

Its revolutionary nature was announced in the first three bars played, the starting discord of Wagner's famous "Tristan chord" resolving onto a dominant seventh, a resolution in name only, as Wagner intended, the constraints of tonality blowing away on a solo woodwind.

It was a night of woodwinds, with Principals Jeff Keesecker (bassoon), Richard Jernigan (clarinet), and Matt Fossa (oboe) plating throughout, as were horns and trumpets (Jeff Leenhouts and Dale Riegler, principals), flutes (lead by Stephanie Riegler, principal), and trombones (Bret Barrow, principal), the latter in the Stravinsky, especially.

After the lush, noir "Liebestod," the delicacy of Debussy was a relief — and executed with grace by all hands, particularly "Clouds" Stravinsky — before drove us forward into a future replete with every species of glorious noise, capping a symphony season in triumph and joy.

