

Beethoven Meets Frankenstein

Dr. Andrew Lan pulls out slide whistle and melodica

By Christy Hartman



Lan is a graduate of Stanford University who attended med school at UCSD. He is a pediatrician in private practice, and a violin and viola player with the Stanford Symphony and Philharmonia as well as local professional groups such as: the Marin Symphony, Symphony Silicon Valley, West Bay Opera and Opera San Jose.

I don't know that I necessarily identify with any of the characters in the novel Frankenstein. With regard to Victor Frankenstein and his creature, both are flawed characters who act in accordance with their understanding of the world. What moves me the most is definitely the prejudice of those who encounter the creature, all of them (except of course the blind man) assuming the creature to be evil based solely on his appearance. And of course tragically the creature then imbues the isolation and hate he observes and actually does become evil, obsessively tracking down and murdering those closest to Victor Frankenstein out of revenge.



Photo by Linda Uyechi

The musical work *Frankenstein!!* that we worked on and performed was actually based on some twisted children's rhymes by H.C. Artmann (of which Frankenstein was only one of about 10 verses). Definitely this piece comes across as pretty satirical and humorous in a disturbing way; even just the use of our unusual instruments, along with the quirky sing-songy libretto and the vocal effects that the narrator/singer are instructed to employ can't help but to impart a "sick humor" that is sure to elicit many nervous laughs from the listener.

For me, the coolest part was by far getting to play the alternative instruments! It's a fantasy of mine to be sitting in orchestra one day in the violin or viola section, only to have the conductor say something like, "We are unfortunately one percussionist short; would any string player like to help out on bass drum?" I would absolutely jump at the chance to bang on some drums! So this *Frankenstein!!* experience allowed me to dabble with some fun instruments that I've never played before, specifically melodica and slide whistle.

In 2010, an American named Jake Heggie composed an opera based on the novel *Moby Dick*, so there are parallels with this *Frankenstein!!* work in that it is based on a classic novel, and shares similar themes of revenge and obsession. I love Heggie's musical style, and am thrilled that Opera San Jose will be staging *Moby Dick* in February.



Photo by Linda Uyechi

Beethoven Meets Frankenstein was performed November 3, 2018 at Bing. Christopher Costanza was the Music Director and Stephen M. Sano was the Conductor. ***Beethoven Meets Frankenstein*** was sponsored by the Department of Music, the Medicine & the Muse Program in Medical Humanities & the Arts, the Center for Biomedical Ethics and Stanford Live.

