

Serving Baltimore/Washington/Annapolis
Circulation: 30,000

The
Johns
Hopkins

May/June 2004

Peabody News



Conductor Harlan Parker acknowledges composer David Gaines and narrator Ambassador Haron Amin to a standing ovation from the audience.

The premiere of David Gaines' *The Lion of Panjshir* draws a Standing Ovation, Critical Acclaim, and some Tears

The world premiere performance of David Gaines' *The Lion of Panjshir* on February 11 was an emotional occasion at Peabody. Performed by the Peabody Wind Ensemble conducted by Harlan Parker, the work honors Ahmad Shah Massoud, Afghanistan's revered resistance leader. It was narrated by His Excellency Haron Amin, Afghanistan's Ambassador to Japan. The narration gained a deeply moving authenticity by being spoken by a man who had himself fought with Massoud.

Reviewing for the *Washington Post*, Grace Jean acclaimed the work as "A stirring tribute.... Mixed meters, ethnic rhythms, and melodic passages are carefully crafted to flow seamlessly with the narration... a captivating performance.... Audience members wept after a chilling account of Massoud's death in the third movement, punctuated by explosive chords and a shocking silence.... Gaines has achieved a milestone in the canon of symphonic band literature with a substantial work that transcends cultural barriers."

The premiere also drew an accolade from notable author and journalist Sebastian Junger. "I cannot imagine a more powerful mix of words, images, and music than *The Lion of Panjshir*," he declared. "People who know nothing of Massoud or Afghanistan will be stunned by the sheer power of the composition, and people who are familiar with these topics will be reduced to tears. It is a tremendous piece of work."

In the *Baltimore Sun*, Tim Smith praised the orchestration: "...the dancing second movement, propelled by colorful percussion writing, evokes Middle Eastern/Central Asian musical idioms with particular panache. . . . Throughout, Gaines demonstrates a keen affinity for orchestration. Woodwinds and brass are vividly exploited; percussion applied with as much subtlety as power. This piece, warmly received by an audience that included members of the Afghan embassy

in Washington and U.N. mission in New York, certainly fulfills its mission of homage."

Among those attending the premiere were: The Honorable Hadayat Amin-Arsala, Vice President of Afghanistan, and Mrs. Amin-Arsala; His Excellency Sayed Tayeb Jawad, Afghanistan's Ambassador to the United States, and Mrs. Jawad; His Excellency Dr. Ravan Farhadi, Ambassador to Afghanistan's Permanent Mission to the United Nations, and Mrs. Farhadi; Mrs. Haron Amin; Mr. Qayum Karzai, brother of Afghanistan's premier Hamid Karzai, and Mrs. Karzai; Mrs. Ali Ahmed Jalali and Ms. Bahar Jalali, wife and daughter of the Minister of the Interior of Afghanistan; and over fifty other members of the Afghan diplomatic corps in the United States.

The Maryland chapter of the UNICEF Committee on Afghanistan sent a large contingent, headed by its chairperson, Mrs. Christine Sarbanes, who was accompanied by her husband Senator Paul Sarbanes. The President of The Johns Hopkins University was represented by his wife Mrs. Wendy Brody. Among other notable guests were Johns Hopkins President Emeritus Dr. Steven Muller and his wife Dr. Jill McGovern Muller; members of the Afghan Desk of the U.S. State Department; journalist Sebastian Junger; editors and staff of *Omaid Weekly*; Mr. Dan Fesperman, who covers Afghanistan for the *Baltimore Sun*; Ms. MaryAnn Beverly, author of *Lion*, a biography of Massoud; noted Afghani musician Ehsan Aman; and members of the Friends of Peabody Committee Julie Lee, Wendy Rosen, Terry Ulmer, and Henry and Kay Ver Valen. Peabody director Robert Sirota hosted the occasion with his wife Vicki (The Reverend Dr. Victoria Ressimyer Sirota).

Many of the guests enjoyed an authentic Afghan dinner at the Helmand prior to the concert and the Helmand also provided a delicious Afghan dessert for the post-concert reception.