

Michigan Pops offer alternative to redundant orchestra shows

By Jim Schiff
Daily Arts Writer

The University is known for its wealth of classical music ensembles. From the Campus Philharmonia to the dozens of international orchestras that visit Ann Arbor every year, students have no shortage of concerts to attend.

But a different sort of orchestra is playing at the Michigan Theater tomorrow night. Putting aside Bach and Beethoven for the Beatles and the Beach Boys, the Michigan Pops Orchestra promises an evening of upbeat American favorites and modern classics.

Comprised of students from LSA, nursing, engineering, business and music, the 55-member MPO is the only student-run and directed orchestra on campus. The ensemble's leadership, elected each fall, is in charge of choosing and arranging music, auditioning musicians, publicizing concerts, designing program booklets and keeping strong relations with its sponsor, the University Activities Center.

On top of all this responsibility is music school senior Chris Lees, the ensemble's musical director. While conducting a group of musicians, let alone his peers, might seem intimidating, Lees finds that the MPO is highly cooperative. "The first rehearsal I went to I was stunned by the eerie silence that happened when I first got on the

podium," he said. "They are very focused in rehearsal and we get some good work done that way — there aren't issues with talking, since we have very limited rehearsal time."

Speaking of time constraints, the MPO rarely has over eight weeks to prepare for a concert. This semester, in particular, with the concert before Thanksgiving, the orchestra has had to pull together quickly. french horn player and program director Nora Dunlop, an LSA junior, felt the pressure on her shoulders, but finds that the MPO's work ethic carried them through. "Everyone really pulled together and went home to practice," she said. "This is a much earlier date than we've ever had, so everyone knew that it was going to take work to play pieces of this caliber."

Tomorrow's program ranks among their most ambitious in recent memory. Performing Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" and Billy Joel's "Lullaby," the MPO dug deep into existing pops repertoire and in some cases, arranged pieces of their own. Lees added a few lines to the Cincinnati Pops' version of "You are my

Lucky Star" from the musical "Singin' in the Rain" and commissioned another student to arrange "Lullaby." The two Beatles' tunes, "A Hard Days Night" and "All My Loving" were arranged specifically for Michigan Pops by a fan in California.

This year, beyond performing as a full group, the MPO began supporting three smaller ensembles. After practicing for only three weeks, a string quartet, woodwind quintet and brass quintet played at Tech Day, an event held last Saturday at the Media Union for

prospective engineering students. Prior to tomorrow's concert, the brass quintet will play in front of the Michigan Theater as a prelude to the performance.

Dunlop, who administrates the new ensembles, finds her participation in the MPO rewarding. "It's just different than any orchestra I've ever been in," she said. "Everyone is there because they want to be and that creates a light-hearted and fun atmosphere."

Lees, a choral education student, echoes Dunlop's sentiments. "We're all there for the music," he said. "There's an understanding that we're going to work hard and have a lot of fun doing it and the end result will be very very cool."

PREVIEW
MICHIGAN POPS
ORCHESTRA
At The Michigan
Theater
Tomorrow at 8 p.m.
\$5 students, \$10 general
UAC

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