

The eclectic first half featured the Grand Rapids Symphony under music director David Lockington with the Community Gospel Chorus under its director, Duane Davis.

Lockington conducted the orchestra in two movements from William Grant Still's "Afro-American" Symphony No. 1. Composed in 1930, it calls to mind the music and rhythms of Gershwin. Conducting passionately, Lockington led a buoyant, performance of strong emotions.

Davis led the 115-voice chorus in a joyous, uplifting performance of "Ise Oluwa," a Nigerian folk song, and a powerful version of Bobby McFerrin's "The Passage, Grace and Hope," which Davis arranged for orchestra and chorus.

Debra Perry's "The Prayer," with Perry at the piano, ended their set with a mighty shout of contemporary gospel sounds.

Earlier in the evening, the fourth annual "Celebration of Soul" dinner was held in the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel. Nearly 250 people were there for the event honoring Duane and Kaye Davis, Bing Goei, and Rev. Clifton Rhodes Jr. with the 2009 Legacy Award.

Next year's "Symphony with Soul" concert will features a contemporary version of Handel's "Messiah." Davis and the chorus gave the audience a sneak peak with one chorus, "And He Will Purify," from the show titled "Too Hot to Handel."

There's every indication that it'll live up to its name.

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