

Symphony No. 8 Times-Picayune review by Chris Waddington

Dankner's "Symphony No. 8" made a fine lagniappe on Thursday. Written just before Hurricane Katrina drove the composer out of New Orleans, the new symphony is the fifth to be premiered by the LPO. With Seibel at the helm, the orchestra proved a convincing advocate for a composer who is steadily coming into his own. (A new work by Dankner recently was commissioned by the orchestras of Nuremberg, Germany, and Kansas City).

"Symphony No. 8" showcased the strength of the orchestra, too. The group's translucent sound let one hear the roiling, harmonic depths of heavily scored passages, and its rhythmic panache helped sustain the musical line in sparser sections. At times, the piece resembled a concerto for orchestra, offering scores of solo spots for different players, especially in the LPO's strong wind section.

Dankner writes like a true symphonist, unfurling fresh ideas in fresh settings. The new piece opens with a long bucolic prelude -- like a soundtrack to dawn in a cypress swamp -- with reedy, slightly dissonant oboe passages, shimmering strings, a tuba solo and four percussionists supplying color.

Played continuously, in three movements, the symphony evolves into a sprightly snare-driven dance framed with beautiful flute solos. (It reminded me of the sardonic dances that pop up in the symphonies of Shostakovich.) And it kept going: a brief dissonant piano solo, watery tolling from a marimba, a brassy march and a game of musical telephone with the same phrase passed among members of the wind section.