
El Paso Times

By Patti Wetzel

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Saturday evening's brilliant performance by the El Paso Symphony Orchestra was an aural feast.

The familiar melody of "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" by Paul Dukas provided the opening appetizer.

For most, this piece is inextricably linked to Disney's "Fantasia" where

REVIEW Mickey Mouse is the apprentice who practices his fledgling power commanding a broomstick to fetch water, only to find himself quite literally in a flood.

There was, however, nothing mousey about the El Paso Symphony's performance. Under the direction of Maestra Sarah Ioannides, the symphony played with great energy and created a mood that was suspenseful and magical, yet whimsical.

It was a crowd pleasing opening and a subtle nod to the water theme that would return later in the program.

The next course of the evening was a delicious rendition of Stravinsky's "Firebird Suite."

Originally composed as a ballet for the great Russian dancer Sergei Diaghilev, the orchestral arrangement tells the tale of Prince Ivan, the evil King Kastchei and the magical firebird. The piece opens with a dark, brooding introduction whose mood was perfectly set by the strings.

With the arrival of the firebird the tempo picks up and the audience was treated to a masterful performance by flutist Melissa Colgin-Albern.

Additional solo passages were beautifully delivered by oboist Janie Sanchez, clarinetist David Ross and bassoonist Sam Rhodes.

Suspenseful symphony show simply magical

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In the *Ronde des princesses*, Ioannides coaxed a lush melody from the strings, which was followed by a forceful, demonic “*Danse infernale du roi Kastchei*.” The *Berceuse* featured a superb bassoon solo and delicate string accompaniment leading to a climactic orchestral *tour de force* in the dance that concluded the suite.

The evening’s meaty entrée was the performance of Tan Dun’s *Water Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra*.

Ioannides provided opening remarks to set the stage for this remarkable composition, introducing the audience to forthcoming organic sounds of water, wind, wood and animals, while outlining the themes of rebirth, baptism, rejuvenation and tears provided by the water metaphor.

In a dimly lit Plaza Theatre, the piece opened with a procession of percussionists who played waterphones while walking through the audience.

These unique instruments, aptly created by Richard Waters, provided an eerie, other-

worldly sound that joined with the symphony strings as the lights came up.

From there the piece took off and the audience was treated to an unusual and amazing amalgam of sights and sounds. David Cossin, the guest percussionist and soloist, was a true virtuoso who displayed remarkable genius as he deftly created inimitable, sensuous, organic and sometimes capricious sounds using large bowls of water and various implements.

After a short prelude, the piece comprised three movements separated by improvisational percussion *credenzas*, each of which was a magnificent work of art in itself. Cellist Ida Steadman joined Cossin with a hauntingly beautiful cello solo at the beginning of the second movement.

Also accompanying Cossin were percussionists Leandro Valenzuela and Mike Saenz with

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notable performances of their own. The third movement came to a thrilling conclusion with the sound of water flowing through a large sieve.

All of this was enhanced by video images of the performance, created by guest videographer Mike Newman, which were projected on large screens above the orchestra.

Maestra Ioannides did a superb job in presenting this masterpiece and what a rare and wonderful treat for El Paso to experience this innovative work of genius.

Although El Paso audiences are often hesitant to embrace the new and avant-garde, that was clearly not the case on Saturday as there was a groundswell of awe and appreciation for the performance, evidenced by a vigorous ovation. It was a triumphant conclusion to the evening’s wonderful program.