

Guest conductor shows off strengths at Arkansas Symphony Orchestra concert

by [Eric E. Harrison](#) | November 11, 2018 at 4:30 a.m.



Guest conductor Sarah Ioannides.

On the mind of many in the audience at Saturday night's Arkansas Symphony Orchestra concert at Little Rock's Robinson Center Performance Hall: Is Sarah Ioannides' guest-conducting gig this weekend a tryout for the orchestra's pending podium vacancy? If so, she could not have had a more auspicious audition.

Music Director Philip Mann advocates using guest conductors, at least one per season, as a way of keeping the orchestra sharp, exposing the musicians to different styles and different techniques and strengthening the musical organization thereby. Ioannides, music director of Symphony Tacoma, certainly did that for this orchestra with some fierce orchestral showpieces, and the players came through with flying colors.

She led, sans score, a gorgeous rendition of Edward Elgar's *"Enigma" Variations*, evoking a fine ensemble performance with several starring solo parts. Slightly longish breaks between many of the 14 variations allowed the audience to see each as a finely crafted gem while preserving the overall integrity of the piece.

Ioannides' style differs markedly from Mann's; her gestures are expressive and forceful, and there's no chance the orchestra might misinterpret any of them, but they mostly come outward from the shoulders -- she sometimes bends, but she does not travel much about the podium. She seemed comfortable in the one pre-piece introduction, which she delivered well stage right (compared with Mann almost always taking stage center or slightly to the right thereof).

That was most evident, perhaps, in the well-performed "Moldau" and "Sarka," the second and third movements of Bedrich Smetana's symphonic cycle *Ma Vlast (My Homeland)*. The first, a tone painting of a long, large Czech river, she took slightly more legato than usual at the top, perhaps to emphasize, via two flutes tumbling over each other, the river as flowing rather than initial trickling; she took the second, a musical interpretation of a legendary, bloody, female warrior, with a considerable amount of panache.

She opened with Joan Tower's *Made in America*, which quotes lightly from "America the Beautiful" and features plenty of tone-painting of Americans hard at work.

Ioannides and the orchestra repeat the program at 3 p.m. today at Robinson, 426 W. Markham St. at Broadway. "Symphony Local," a new pre-concert street festival (1-2:30 p.m.), features artists and craftsmen, food trucks and drink vendors. Ticket information is available by calling (501) 666-1761, Extension 100, or online at ArkansasSymphony.org.