

# THE VIRGINIA GAZETTE

## Opener salutes Falletta

Virginia Symphony director celebrates 20th year

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By John Shulson

The Virginia Symphony's opening concert of the 2010-11 season was a fitting tribute to JoAnn Falletta's 20th year as music director. It was a program of luxurious sounds and heightened emotions that permitted Falletta to display fully her ability to craft and shape sounds and to draw from her musicians the utmost music and expression.

As this new season begins, and with the sounds of this program fresh in memory, we are again aware of the high-quality musical experiences this first class organization offers and the significant contributions it makes to our quality of life. One of the hallmarks of Falletta's tenure has been diverse programming, bringing to us works that keep us up to date on what's happening in the wider world of music.

Appropriately, the Symphony received an award for Adventurous Programming from the American Society of Composers, Authors & Publishers, which is a big deal. Although it was primarily for the world premieres the orchestra offered, it also suggests the efforts made toward encouraging awareness of new and contemporary works by such composers as Robert Sirota, whose "A Rush of Wings" opened the program.

Sirota, who was on hand for the concert, briefly explained that the inspiration for the piece came about through a religious conversion that found his music taking on images of flight. He went on to say that "Rush" also embodied the conceptual idea of the soul and spirit lifting off the ground.

In fact, that's just what "Rush" seemed to say musically.



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Throughout the brief work, there was a suggested sound of the beating of wings, moving ever onward and upward until breaking through the clouds.

There was a sense of gentle urgency as percussive sounds of chimes, bells, harp, and the ever ethereal celesta contributed to the colorful orchestration and the desired imagery of birds and the spirit in flight.

It was an uplifting start to the Symphony's upcoming 91st year of music making.

Falletta also shines at showcasing works not so frequently heard, such as Glazunov's Violin Concerto in A Minor. The A Minor is a beautiful piece that exudes the Russian spirit but not in the same sense as, for example, the pyrotechnic Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in D Major.

It overflows with rich harmonies and orchestrations that embrace the mind and, somewhat appropriately following the Sirota, transport you on wings of romantic flight. Effectively laced into the luxurious lines are technically demanding passages of heightened challenges.

It takes a superior violinist to take on this beautiful work, and the youthful Korean-born violinist Chee-Yun easily showed herself to be just that. She easily met the work's many challenges, offering an expressive interpretation, lyrical quality and tone, and impressive technique, all qualities which enhanced the Glazunov's emotional layers. She honored us with an encore of Kreisler's Scherzo-Caprice, truly a virtuoso display.

The evening closed with the powerhouse Fifth Symphony of Tchaikovsky. Rich, luxurious lines, surging passion, power, and a finale of heroic proportions make the Fifth a very appealing listen.

From its turbulent opening and almost painfully beautiful Andante Cantabile to its lilting Valse and rousing close, the Tchaikovsky was given a thorough treatment by Falletta and musicians. While there were some minor issues with brass blips here and there, it was an exciting performance that merited its spontaneous standing ovation.

Falletta honored — Prior to the start of the concert, Newport News Vice Mayor Madeline McMillan presented Falletta a proclamation in honor of her 20th year with the Virginia Symphony citing her as "...a community treasure."