

The Columbus Dispatch

Strings shine in spotlight in ProMusica season-ending show

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By Jennifer Hambrick / For The Columbus Dispatch

The ProMusica Chamber Orchestra showed off a different kind of string theory Saturday night at the Southern Theatre, in the first of two season-ending performances of works by Bartok, Mozart and Astor Piazzolla featuring the orchestra's strings, violin soloist and ProMusica principal guest artist and creative partner Vadim Gluzman and viola soloist Paul Neubauer.

The soloists and a few of ProMusica's string players first played backup in two selections with students from the United Schools Network in ProMusica's Play Us Forward program.

ProMusica Music Director David Danzmayr led the orchestra's strings through a winsome performance of Bartok's Romanian Dances. The tune of the first dance — "Stick Dance" — had great flair, even if the violin sounded less vibrant than it might have been.

"Sash Dance" was delicate and self-effacing, while "In One Spot" was mysterious and haunting, largely because of the eerie special effects in concertmaster Katherine McLin's solo.

In "Dance From Bucsum," McLin played a much different solo with lovely, yearning sound. The strings were at their best in the heavy-footed "Romanian Polka" and the concluding "Fast Dance."

The opening chords of Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante, K. 364 were perfectly balanced and had just the right rhythmic kick. Throughout the movement, soloists Gluzman and Neubauer played solo passages and, together, the final cadenza with lustrous sound and tremendous expressive flair.

Both soloists captured the operatic lyricism of their lines in the second movement, Andante, with Neubauer's rich, warm sound in particular bringing a glow to Mozart's melodies. The orchestra ranged from a shadowy presence behind the soloists to an impassioned chorus when playing alone. In the cadenza, Gluzman and Neubauer were like hand in glove.

Orchestra and soloists alike were lightness and levity in the third movement, Presto, where the musicians bounced, snapped and soared in sprightly rhythms and dazzling passagework to the end.

Piazzolla's music always has that loosen-your-necktie feeling, and Eduardo Caffi's string arrangement of Piazzolla's Coral Tango ushered in the concert's second half with easy, jazz-inspired harmonies and longing melodies played with soul and sensitivity.

Danzmayr led the orchestra in a pristine reading of the first movement of Mozart's Symphony No. 29. Punctuating lovely string playing in Andante were some beautifully shaped moments in the oboes and horns.

The musicians galloped through the opening and closing sections of the third movement, Minuetto, with plenty of air and light beneath their metaphorical hooves and made fine filigree of the delicate middle section.

The rapid-fire passagework in the finale fluttered like the wings of hummingbirds, maintaining lightness even at robust dynamics and brimming with joy to the very end.