



# Excellent solo playing, musical form hold true to performance

## our take

W&M's director of orchestras is a precise conductor. Symphony players had energy, rhythm.

By Lee Teply  
Correspondent

The Virginia Symphony Orchestra, busy for the last month with the Virginia Opera production of "La Bohème," had time in the past week to fit in a pair of performances, one on Thursday in Williamsburg with JoAnn Falletta conducting. For the repeat of that program Saturday evening at Regent University, Akiko Fujimoto was on the podium.

The director of orchestras at the College of William and Mary, Fujimoto is in her third season as conducting associate of the Virginia Symphony. She is quite a precise conductor, giving the players clear instruction that results in energetic, rhythmic performance.

This was a particularly valuable skill in Behzad Ranjbaran's Concerto for Violin, Viola and Orches-

tra, which was premiered in these concerts. The Iranian-born, Juilliard-trained composer asked a lot by including challenges in both rhythmic precision and dissonant tunings in this piece.

But the piece is not just about modern musical stress. There are also long passages of beautiful, tonal, melodic writing. There is quite a good balance between the various elements. The concerto's soloists, violinist Vahn Armstrong and violist Beverly Kane Baker, were both secure in their roles. Frequently playing in high registers, they balanced their tones to match each other and to carry over the orchestra.

As their functions changed through the piece, they adjusted their sounds appropriately. They had a chance to shine on their own in the long cadenza to the first movement, in which they were joined by harpist Barbara Chapman. This chamber music style was an effective contrast to the big orchestral writing of other sections.

If the first movement had great variety of color, the second had only one, that of muted strings. Described by the composer as a nocturne,

it may have had the reduced volume of a dream, but it did not always have tranquility. Although it was quite interesting to follow the wandering lines of its ornamental arabesques, it was also good to wake up from the troubled slumber and go on to the last movement.

Much briefer and more direct in its musical effect, the last movement had much rhythmic challenge in its angular lines. The image was of scampering from place to place, with only a pause before moving on. Again, both the writing and playing were at high technical levels, giving the new piece the need for more performances to be more completely appreciated by more listeners.

Ottorino Respighi's "The Birds" (1928) opened the program. Based on melodies by several Baroque composers, it is at times atmospheric, and at others quite direct and pictorial. Excellent solo playing, most notably by principal oboist Sherie Lake Aguire, was a significant part of the composer's orchestral effects.

In his "Scottish" Symphony, Felix Mendelssohn also used music to describe nature, although he was primarily concerned with

musical form, something that was quite clear in Fujimoto's interpretation. She built up great energy in the first movement's introduction but lost some of it moving gradually into the main theme.

There were occasions when her relaxations of tempo took some of the life out of the music. But it always came back to drive things forward. The scherzo's unusually fast tempo kept the players alert and did not seem to cause them any problems.

The songlike portions of the slow third movement were a welcome contrast. Their calm melodic lines gave a Classical balance to the busy – and neatly performed – writing that surrounded them.

Lee Teply, [lteply@odu.edu](mailto:lteply@odu.edu)

## at the venue

**What** Virginia Symphony performing Ottorino Respighi's "The Birds" and Behzad Ranjbaran's Concerto for Violin, Viola and Orchestra (premier)

**When** Thursday, Williamsburg; Saturday, Regent University