

ZUILL BAILEY

CELLO

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Fairfax Symphony Orchestra

Gold balloons, gold-highlighted programs and an extensive lobby display of a half-century of photos and articles left no doubt about what the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra was celebrating at George Mason University's Center for the Arts Saturday night. There was plenty of music, too -- all nicely gilded, if not always 24-karat.

The 50th anniversary celebration also marked Music Director William Hudson's 35 years leading the orchestra -- and 43 years for violist Lisa Baltzer. Richard Strauss's "Vienna Philharmonic Fanfare," all brass and timpani, was a suitably sonorous and grandiose opener.

The evening's highlight was Dvorak's Cello Concerto in B Minor, Op. 104. Fairfax native Zuill Bailey turned in an intimate, lyrical performance on his 1693 Matteo Gofriller cello -- with his sister, Allison Bailey, as concertmaster. The violin-cello duets in the finale were highlights, as were the tender sections that Dvorak based on his song "Leave Me Alone" -- in memory of his much-loved sister-in-law Josefina, whose favorite it was.

Hudson took a more symphonic view of the concerto than Zuill Bailey did, and there was some less-than-perfect flute intonation, but as a whole, the orchestra played with finesse and drama.

The rest of the evening brought lighter fare. Robert Russell Bennett's "Symphonic Picture of 'Porgy and Bess'" smooths Gershwin's deliberately rough edges, but the orchestra played it rousing. Among three John Williams works, the "Imperial March" from "The Empire Strikes Back" was most effective. "Liberty Fanfare" and the march from the film "1941" were comparatively stolid and pale -- especially in contrast to Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever," an encore that produced the golden glow of prolonged applause.

-- Mark J. Estren

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