

ZUILL BAILEY

CELLO

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Oregon guest, symphony find rapport for ballets

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It is a measure of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra's maturity that a guest conductor can elicit performances at the same level as music director JoAnn Falletta.

Saturday evening, Giancarlo Guerrero, music director of the Eugene (Ore.) Symphony, took the podium for a program that, while interesting, did not automatically guarantee success. Guerrero made a good deal of this varied assortment of works and styles.

Two 20th-century ballets provided the opening and closing sections of the concert. Stravinsky's "Apollon Musagete" dates from the 1920s and is firmly in the composer's neoclassical style. For some listeners, this means it lacks the primary colors and exciting rhythms of his earlier ballets.

In this piece, Stravinsky limited himself to a string orchestra and to a lofty subject – the birth and inspiration of Apollo by his Muses. In compensation for the absence of orchestral thrills, Stravinsky wrote music of placid loveliness, with occasional tart harmonies to remind us that this is not Mozart.

Guerrero paced the work carefully, allowing as much variety as possible between the various sections, and maintaining a distinct rhythmic edge to provide contrast. Once past some indecision in the opening minutes of the ballet, the strings played very well for their guest, with some very attractive first-chair solos.

The conductor's lively but not overdone podium style also drew a sharp and colorful performance of Copland's "Appalachian Spring," the

REVIEW

Who: The Virginia Symphony Orchestra with Giancarlo Guerrero and Zuill Bailey

When: Saturday evening

Where: Chrysler Hall, Norfolk

final work of the concert.

The Shaker hymn melody that dominates the final section can overpower the rest, such as the haunting quiet ending. Guerrero somehow managed to keep the usually restless Chrysler Hall audience at bay for what seemed to be a full minute before applause finally began, allowing the moment its full effect.

Between Stravinsky and Copland came two cello showcases for the considerable skills of Zuill Bailey.

In Haydn's Cello Concerto in C Major, Bailey maintained a clean line with controlled vibrato, so that the music's classical boundaries were never violated. This meant energy and forward motion in the first movement, a strong lyrical line in the slow movement, and excitement in the finale.

The cellist's playing always had purpose, and the rich tone of his 1693 Goffriller cello was more successful than most in overcoming Chrysler Hall's string-unfriendly acoustic.

This was evident as well in Tchaikovsky's "Variations on a Rococo Theme," in which the cellist had bigger orchestral forces to contend with. He played with a fuller tone in keeping with the more Romantic nature of the music, and he sustained interest in what is one of Tchaikovsky's less interesting works.

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