

# REVIEW: Symphony ends Opener with two encores

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FOR THE JEFFERSONIAN

**NEW CONCORD** — The world over, the feeling of excitement a concert goer has is much the same, the anticipation of a couple of hours experiencing that entity known as live music is the same everywhere. On the evening of Oct. 30, those people stepping into Brown Chapel felt this excitement, this anticipation of the magic of a live performance of the Southeastern Ohio Symphony Orchestra under the innovative leadership of Dr. Laura E. Schumann, music director and conductor.

This night proved to be a very special performance because Dr. Schumann brought Gilbert Mata, tenor from Germany, for a return engagement to open the 32nd season of the Symphony. The house was filled for the concert under the baton of the popular Dr. Schumann; the audience was not to be disappointed.

Throughout the entire opening selection of Rossini's Overture to the Barber of Seville, Maestra Schumann conducted with no score to which she could refer; the musicians responded to her artful direction, rising to a level of excellence to which they could only have dreamed as little as three years ago. The tempo was brisk and the soloists performed with an enthusiasm and skill that set the tone for the entire piece.

The standard set by the Overture was carried through to the Bizet's L'Arlesienne, which closed out the first section of the concert. Once again, Dr. Schumann's conducting skills both pushed and inspired the musicians to a level of performance to finish the first half of the program with a positive tone and certainly set a fore-shadowing of performances to come for the remainder of the 2005-2006 season.

A crisp baton style broken with periods of fluid hand movements translated into smooth transitions between the sharp, quick sections and the more flowing ones of the Suite, blending together into a skillful and well-interpreted whole. Bizet must have intended when he wrote this in the 1800s.

Throughout the first half of the program, Maestra Schumann maintained complete control of the performance as a whole with the musicians responding to her seemingly smallest movement. A clearly audible crack from the stage, resulting unfortunately from one of the double bass's cracking on a seam, tested this composure, but both the conductor and the orchestra continued as though nothing had happened out of the ordinary.

The audience rewarded the conductor and the orchestra with enthusiastic applause at the conclusion of the first half of the performance.

The lights of the Chapel dimmed signaling to return to seats for the remainder of the concert. Gilbert Mata and Maestra Schumann walked through the orchestra to the front of the stage; Mr. Mata took his place in front of the podium and Dr. Schumann

stepped up on the podium, lifted her baton, and the familiar music of Leonard Bernstein's West Side Story surged through the hall. Mr. Mata moved forward nearly whispered the name, "Maria ...," before singing even the first notes of the perennially loved melody.

Although to a critic, Mr. Mata may have seemed a bit shaky at first, he carried the music professionally; and the orchestra, under Dr. Schumann's sensitive direction, kept in near perfect sync with soloist Mata's interpretation of Bernstein's music. The audience responded with great appreciation to this very popular tenor in southeastern Ohio.

For the remainder of the second half of the concert, the audience was treated to a review of the American musical with selections from My Fair Lady, Kismet, Les Miserables, Sound of Music, South Pacific, Oklahoma that Dr. Schumann commented to the audience they had tried to devise a way to re-write as "Ohio" but could not find an acceptable way, Show Boat, Three Penny Opera, and Man from LaMancha.

With the soloist on stage the entire second half of the concert, Dr. Schumann devised a creative and clever mode to give him the necessary breaks vocalists require; she arranged medleys from some of the musicals for the orchestra to play in order to give Mr. Mata a break and yet to keep him on stage at the same time. Dr. Schumann's versatility and skill became evident when it was known that not only this programming technique was her idea but also the scoring of the medleys was her work as well.

By popular demand, two encores were performed and those who might have left the performance early surely missed two special treats. The first continued in the Broadway tradition with Mata giving perhaps his best and most convincing performance of the evening singing the haunting "Once upon a Time" from the no longer produced musical, All American. Mata clearly enjoys performing this song, which he does with great sensitivity in his strikingly beautiful tenor voice that bordered on splendid.

The second encore was the age old favorite, Granada, sung in near flawless Spanish and with the fervor and emotion audiences around the world have come to love. Making a most enjoyable second encore even more pleasant, the conductor again kept the orchestra in sync with Mata's interpretation of those lyrics and that melody. No one in the audience left disappointed because the musical director knew how to please her audience with this first performance of the year. Both Schumann and Mata exercised a full range of their skills much to the pleasure of those fortunate enough to have been in Brown Chapel on Oct. 30.

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**Re-Elect**