



Charlotte Symphony rocks with Duke Ellington

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Patrons of the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra, more accustomed to Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 1, op.10, in F minor, ran smack dab into Duke **Ellington** at the Charlotte Performing Arts Center, and they loved it. Switching gears under Maestro Raffaele Ponti, the orchestra swung into classical, up-tempo jazz that had its sold-out Sunday night audience rocking.

The orchestra also received a palpable boost up the scale, nationally, from jazz legend and guest artist Marvin Stamm.

The program opened with "Symphonic Dances" from Leonard Bernstein's classic "West Side Story." It married the intensity of orchestra's augmented brass and percussion sections' lively Latin dances, with stirring strings playing love songs like, "Somewhere, There's A Place for Us," — bringing the audience to its feet.

Then the orchestra, featuring the music of Duke **Ellington** and the trumpet artistry of Stamm, just about blew the roof off the place.

Swinging through memorable **Ellington** like "Sophisticated Lady," "Caravan," and "Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got That Swing," with Stamm on the trumpet, and Dave Mancini improvising a startling three-minute drum solo, the orchestra brought the audience to its feet once again, this time roaring its approval.

Ponti had announced at the beginning that the evening wasn't going to feature a jazz concert. But with Stamm accompanists Per Danielsson on the piano and bassist Mark Neuenschwander riffing crowd-pleasing solos, and Mancini electrifying with his drums, it was at least a symphonic replica.

Perhaps patron Frank Sperry best summed up the audience reaction. "It was amazing, tremendous," he said. "My mind is exploding." Said orchestra supporter Judi Roth, "Awesome, absolutely awesome. I'm so proud. So much energy, life, impact."

Brian Presley marveled, "I closed my eyes, and I was hearing the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The maestro has brought the orchestra to the pinnacle of professionalism." Patron Bob Peterson said, "I lived in Cleveland for 32 years listening to the Cleveland Orchestra. This one compares. Not as big, but just as good."

Donna and John Phillips, were visiting Punta Gorda from Spokane, Wash. "Three thousand miles for a most delightful experience," Donna said. "It was almost overpowering."

The second half of the concert was largely a virtuoso performance by Stamm. Alternating between trumpet and coronet, he enthralled the audience with several selections, including Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Corcovado," a touching piece he wrote for his wife, "Samba Du Nancy," and spirited Latin rhythms from George Gershwin's "Cuban Overture."

During the session, he took time to thank the audience for its attendance and support of the orchestra, and to champion music education in the schools. "Music is what I believe in," he said, "But (in today's world) it is slipping away from us." He said two of his heroes in life are his high school band director and his music teacher.

He lauded the orchestra as well, telling the audience they weren't accompanying him, they were interacting with him, feeding him their music, being "as much a part of what I do as my accompanists."

In a post-concert interview, Stamm, who has played with leading bands, orchestras and entertainers around the country, praised the orchestra, and Ponti, further.

"In rehearsal," he said, "I was fascinated. He (Ponti) interprets the music beautifully. He brings the most modest details out. He sees the picture he wants them to paint. They respond to the environment he

creates.

“They are a beautifully rehearsed orchestra,” he said. “It was a moving performance. So clear, so wonderful. One of the best I’ve seen so far. In less than five years, he (Ponti) will be sought by orchestras all over the country.”

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