

Oberlin Orchestras featuring faculty soloists (Dec. 6 & 9)

by Neil McCalmont



Two orchestra concerts given at Oberlin's Finney Chapel during the first week of December featured faculty soloists and yielded phenomenal results.

On December 6, Raphael Jiménez led the Oberlin Chamber Orchestra in a concert highlighted by Beethoven's *Violin Concerto*. The audience roared as professor of violin Gregory Fulkerson took the stage for his last

appearance with the ensemble as he prepares to retire from the Conservatory this spring after a tenure of 35 years.

The ensemble began the exposition of Beethoven's monumental concerto with a big, bright sound. When the soloist finally enters, the Orchestra and Fulkerson blended beautifully, as if old friends. The violinist's crisp, clean articulation painted the portrait of a suave, gentlemanly figure, and was mirrored especially well by clarinetist Michael Chen during their tender second-movement duet. The soloist's lush tone was complemented by subtle dynamic inflections, especially during the elegant yet buoyant finale.

Next came Respighi's colorful *Brazilian Impressions*, an orchestral suite exploring the possibilities of timbre. The Orchestra's opening, with ethereal oboe and clarinet solos, brought you drifting down a rainforest canal in pitch darkness. Brooding bassoons open the snake-inspired second movement, building up the coiling texture of motifs with the rest of the orchestra. A carnivalesque "Song and Dance" on par with any party in Rio finishes the work with whooping horns and intoxicating rhythms.

The evening concluded with an electrifying performance of Rossini's *William Tell* Overture. The opening cello solos were splendid. And following the excellent English

horn and flute solos, the brass majestically introduced the work's famous "Lone Ranger" theme. With Olympic might, this Orchestra brought to life a piece that is too often heard only as a cartoon soundtrack.

On the following Friday, December 9, Raphael Jiménez again took the podium to lead the Oberlin Orchestra — commonly known on-campus as "Big" — in a concert featuring Brahms's *Double Concerto in a*. Amir Eldan, Professor of Cello, played the opening lines with a rich, romantic sound that brilliantly captured the mournfulness of the passage. Professor of violin David Bowlin joined in Eldan's mournfulness, the two playing together as one tormented soul. It was a treat hearing and watching the duo trade themes and play tug-of-war with the melodies. Their warm vibrato blended beautifully with the orchestra. The second movement rocked gently like tides, and the pair brought out the devilish runs in the work's closing "Vivace non troppo," receiving an enthusiastic ovation from the audience.

Afterward, Jiménez led the Orchestra in eight selections from Prokofiev's ballet *Romeo and Juliet*. The opening to "Montagues and Capulets" engulfed Finney Chapel, drifting away into a surreal string section. From the playful spurts of sound in "Juliet the Young Girl" to the grotesque marches in "Masks," and from the gripping "Friar Lawrence" to the exquisite flute solo of the "Morning Serenade," the Orchestra admirably took on the roles of Shakespeare's characters through Prokofiev's lense.

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