

JoAnn Falletta Returns to CIM

by Mike Telin



When she was appointed Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, JoAnn Falletta became the first woman to lead a major American orchestra. On Wednesday, April 12 at 7:30 pm Falletta will lead the Cleveland Institute of Music Orchestra in music by Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, and Hailstork at Severance Music Center. Admission is free but [reservations](#) are required.

Falletta also serves as Music Director Laureate of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, and Principal Guest Conductor of the

Brevard Music Center. The multiple GRAMMY-winner was recently named one of the “Fifty Great Conductors,” past and present, by Gramophone Magazine. I caught up with her by phone and began our conversation by asking about her frequent appearances as guest conductor at CIM.

Mike Telin: You’ve been guest conducting at CIM quite a bit during the past few years.

JoAnn Faletta: I have and I just love it there. I think it’s such good karma because it’s the kind of conservatory where the standards are very high and excellence is expected. But there’s also a tradition of support between the faculty and students. There’s a feeling of a family, which for an artist education, I think that’s absolutely the best.

I think the students are very lucky and most seem really happy and energized by what CIM is offering. It's growing and I think change is good. I think the pandemic caused us all to reevaluate what's important and how we work. And I'm excited by their sense of the future.

MT: And speaking of new, this concert will be in Severance and part of CIM's new collaboration with The Cleveland Orchestra.

JF: I'm very excited about that because this will be the first time I have conducted there. Of course I've been to a lot of Cleveland Orchestra concerts there but this is the first time I've had the opportunity to work on the Severance stage.

MT: What is it about the Hall that you think makes it so wonderful?

JF: The acoustics are super — I can't imagine anyone not being swept away by that. There's also a sense of intimacy that I love. Wherever you are sitting, and I've sat in many different places, there's a closeness to the stage. It's also the sense of history. The sense of George Szell being on the stage and all of the maestros afterwards. And the amazing group of musicians who play on that stage. It's as though the hall has absorbed that excellence.

MT: Wednesday's program is great: Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto and Dvořák's Symphony No. 6 and Adolphus Hailstork's Three Spirituals. I noticed that Buffalo has recorded quite a bit of Hailstork's music.

JF: The BPO just released a recording of his incredible piano concerto. He wrote in the 1990s for the Virginia Symphony and we gave the world premiere. To me it's one of the greatest piano concertos in the American repertoire since Gershwin.

I know Dolph very well. He still lives in Virginia but we moved there at the same time. I came to be the music director of the Virginia Symphony and he came to teach at Norfolk State and Old Dominion University. And we were living in the same apartment building. Since he was living in the region he, in a way, became the Virginia Symphony's composer in residence. Not in a recognized way but every year he would write a new piece and we couldn't wait to play it.

Of course we played the *Three Spirituals*, and it's great for me to introduce Adolphus Hailstork to the young musicians. Maybe some have played his music but maybe not. He is a vibrant American voice and I think they will love it. He takes spirituals that we know and casts them for orchestra in a unique and beautiful way that I think will be fun for them to play.

MT: I didn't realize you had such a close relationship with him.

JF: Yes, in fact we're working on a couple of projects now in Buffalo. We're going to record his *Festival Music* and we've commissioned a saxophone concerto from him. He's now 81, but he's had kind of a reawakening of people saying "wow, he is an incredible composer." Many of us knew that, but it seems that people who haven't heard his music are becoming aware of it and they are astonished.

He's still very much alive and still writing. I'm doing the premiere of his Second Piano Concerto in Virginia next season. He's retired from teaching so he's now working fulltime as a composer.

MT: Wednesday's concerto also includes Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto played by Concerto Competition winner Karisa Chiu.

JF: What I'm happy about is that of course you think it's a piece that everybody knows, but this is the first time that our soloist is playing it. And it's probably the first time that many people in the orchestra will be playing it. And for them to discover this masterpiece of the violin, orchestra repertoire is a big thrill for me.

MT: I must confess that I never get tired of hearing it.

JF: Nor do I. I schedule it in Buffalo every other year with a different violinist and no one ever complains — the audience or the orchestra.

MT: you are right, we often forget that many students will be playing this for the first time.

That's what I love about CIM, being there with them during their discovery of a piece and to see them come to love it. And to remember what I felt like the first time I played it is exciting.

MT: And then you have Dvořák's Symphony No. 6. I love his music — it's always fresh. I'm sorry I'm putting words in your mouth.

JF: Oh no, I love his music and as you say, it is always fresh — we feel like we know it already. It comes right from his heart. Right from his devotion to Bohemia and the Czech people. And because of that it just glows with the kind of warmth, intensity, and sincerity that is so real.

And I chose a symphony that I thought the orchestra might not know. Maybe they've played the New World, or No. 8, but they probably haven't played No. 6. Which is one of my favorites. And again, I hope they will love discovering it.

MT: I'd like to switch topics to the Buffalo Philharmonic and the recent Carnegie Hall concert.

JF: Yes, and we celebrated the 100th anniversary of Lukas Foss. I guess his name is not a household word, but he was an important music director in the '70s and '80s because he really put the BPO on the map in terms of its dedication to new music. He was a great composer himself but also a fierce advocate for new music — composers of every type. A lot of it is very avant garde but a lot of it is now in our American music lexicon. He created an orchestra that was flexible and into new music — and an audience that was open minded.

We have a CD coming out on NAXOS of the repertoire that we played — a fantastic symphony, flute concerto, and *Three American Pieces* for violin and orchestra.

I knew Lukas very well from my time of working with him as associate conductor in Milwaukee. I hope this will introduce some people who don't know his music and get it programmed again because he is a fabulous composer.

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