

Violinist Wows MSO
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Sonja Salerno-Sonnenberg once more proves she has friends in the Madison Symphony Orchestra audience—and that she deserves them.

Violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg returned to Madison Friday for her fourth performance with the Madison Symphony Orchestra and, if the audience has its way, she will soon return for a fifth.

The soloist played Astor Piazzolla's "Four Season of Buenos Aires," essentially a 25-minute Tango, and kept the Overture Hall audience with her every minute.

Through it all, she appeared to be having a wonderful time, slapping her thigh for time, mugging with the audience and with Music Director John DeMain—the ambiance of the piece was of a musician jamming with her pals.

"The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires" lends itself to that style of play. Written originally as four separate pieces for Piazzolla's quintet, it was compiled into an orchestra work after the Argentine composer's death (the audience learns all this from J. Michael Allsen's program notes).

Each "season" is a separate movement, and soloists can arrange them at will. Salerno-Sonnenberg arranged them as spring, summer, winter and fall.

When the audience ended a prolonged standing ovation and filed out for intermission, one man leaned over the railing separating the seating sections in Overture and shouted to an acquaintance, "We might as well go home, it's not going to get any better than this."

He was partially right; it didn't get any better, but the second act, which consisted of Gustav Mahler's "Symphony No. 1 in D Major," seemed to please the audience just as much.

That's actually saying quite a bit. The symphony is 53 minutes long—that's long!—who is one of DeMain's favorite composers (sic)—can be a bit dreary.

But not in this symphony. After the small string orchestra for Salerno-Sonnenberg's Tangos, the Mahler piece featured the full orchestra, including cymbals, a gong, the brass section, all playing full blast.

It absolutely rocked the house and, when completed, earned the orchestra its own standing ovation. Madison audiences always stand to cheer the soloists, but it is rare for the symphonies to win such applause and rarer still for the French horn section to be cheered out loud.

Mahler's first symphony includes any number of familiar tunes. Of particular interest is the third movement, a funeral march played to the muted children's tune "Frere Jacques." One wouldn't normally expect the tune to be used as a dirge, but it worked.

All in all, this second MSO symphony of the season was a great success.