

Charlotte Symphony Orchestra bids adieu, rebranded Punta Gorda Symphony



CSO Maestro Raffaele Ponti applauds Concertmaster Ming Gao after his rendition of the "Theme from Schindler's List".

After 16 years, the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra went out in style Sunday before standing, cheering afternoon and evening audiences at the Charlotte Performing Arts Center in Punta Gorda.

It was the orchestra's final concerts under the CSO brand, as it has been renamed the Punta Gorda Symphony.

Its farewell vehicle Sunday was "John Williams & Friends," a nostalgic symphonic venture through themes of classic Hollywood movies, most of them arranged by Williams — scores that led to his more than 50 Academy Award nominations, the most in history.

Opening with a resounding medley from "The Empire Strikes Back," including "Star Wars," the orchestra had its appreciative audiences smiling from the get-go.

Then, there was the happy, iconic theme of "E.T. (The Extra Terrestrial)," where, carried on the soaring strings of the orchestra, the audiences could almost envision E.T. being called home.

There was the haunting history of the Holocaust as well, as concertmaster Ming Gao captured the breath of the audiences with his powerfully beautiful rendition of the "Theme from Schindler's List."

The solemn, emotional "Hymn to the Fallen," from "Saving Private Ryan," brought a somber quiet to the audiences, as soaring strings faded to a quiet whisper of a slow, rhythmical, singular brush of a drum, followed by total quiet. The audiences' cheers were resounding.

But maestro Raffaele Ponti, had plenty of upbeat moments as well, in his eclectic musical mix from the movies.

The “Raiders March” from “Raiders of the Lost Ark” had the audiences all but marching in their seats.

There was drama, too, with James Horner’s arrangement of the theme from “Apollo 13,” bringing the audiences back to Tom Hanks’ portrayal of astronaut Jim Lovell’s historic, spellbinding return to earth in the damaged space capsule.

Upbeat presentations included Hans Zimmer’s music from the movie “Gladiator,” and Williams’ “The Cowboys Overture,” from “The Cowboys.”

The final presentation was a four-part “Suite for Orchestra” from “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone.” The final movement, “Harry’s Wondrous World,” ended with the entire orchestra in a full bore in a thunderous finish, bringing the audiences to long, standing ovations.”

Next concert

The newly-minted Punta Gorda Symphony’s initial concert will be on Sunday, Nov. 10, at 7:30 p.m. at the Charlotte Performing Arts Center in Punta Gorda.

It will feature the rarely heard “Concerto for Double Bass” by Serge Koussevitzky, played by guest artist Leonid Finkelshteyn, principal bass of the North Carolina Symphony and the Eastern Music Festival Orchestra.

For tickets and information: PGSymphony.org, or 941-205-5996.