



Punta Gorda Symphony at the Charlotte Performing Arts Center

Punta Gorda Symphony led by Maestro Raffaele Livio Ponti enthralled a packed house at the Charlotte Performing Arts Center. Guest soloist, award-winning, renowned, and gifted violinist Sirena Huang delivered a marvelous performance. Here's an account of this delightful, exciting evening of musical joy that began before the orchestra entered the stage.



Punta Gorda Symphony at the Charlotte Performing Arts Center. Photo by Steve Donaldson.

Maestro Ponti met with audience members an hour earlier to articulate his insights into tonight's program. A gifted public speaker, Ponti intuitively describes musical works and visual art. He is personable, engaging, and connects people to the music through his well-informed scholarly anecdotes. His technical and historical insights build familiarity, enthusiasm, and anticipation for the audience participant, akin to Leonard Bernstein's famous Harvard Lectures and introduction of musical works at his Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic

To a captivated audience, Ponti described the lyrical qualities of Antonín Dvořák's Violin Concerto in A minor, noting its exciting connection to 19th-century violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim to whom Dvořák dedicated the work. Ponti noted that Joachim never performed the work and for a time considered it unplayable. We discovered that there is a version of the concerto with edits suggested by Joachim simplifying some of the passages—we were to be treated tonight to the original, the version once deemed unplayable, performed by the marvelous Sirena Huang. Ponti express similar admiration for Dvořák's symphonies and his plans for performing them with the Symphony.

He noted the fame and popularity of Dvořák's Symphony No. 5 in E minor (From the New World) with its unique relationship to America and the Largo with its marvelous theme (Going Home) of unmistakable nostalgia and pathos. The Maestro introduced this evening's other works with equal aplomb.

Interestingly, Maestro Ponti organizes Violin 1 stands to his left and Violin 2 stands to the right. For those sitting centrally, this provides a marvelous stereophonic effect indicative of Ponti's insightful consideration of how composers through the late 19th-century visualized and wrote for an orchestra. Arguably, the arrangement of orchestral instruments on a stage affects a composer's method of orchestrating a symphonic work. This arrangement worked equally well for the rest of the program, despite the more recent origins of the other works. You may have noted that most modern orchestras arrange all violins to the conductor's left

with cellos to the front right. This is the “Stokowski shift”, an invention of famed and innovative conductor Leopold Stokowski.

Punta Gorda Symphony opens the new year on January 16, featuring award-winning violinist Sirena Huang and Dvořák’s Violin Concerto.

Violinist Sirena Huang gracefully entered the stage. Maestro Ponti followed, stepped up to his desk, and by his presence gained the orchestra’s attention. The orchestra opened with the first of the concerto’s three movements, *Allegro ma no troppo*. It began dramatically with an orchestral flourish, ushering in the principal theme announced by the soloist. Lyrical and vigorous, it follows a basic sonata form with some transcendence of the classic model. Without pause, Huang led us into the marvelous *Adagio ma non troppo* in F major, featuring the soloist’s *romanza* accompanied by woodwinds. Dvořák draws from his Czech melodies with a series of elaborate passages leading back to the simple principal theme. After a *Poco più mosso*, we enter *Un poco tranquillo* and are treated to an extended rhapsody Huang intones with warmth and poetry.

The third movement *Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo* features a lively rondo. With dash and *élan*, shining brightly, Huang conquered the folkish themes. She glows, ending the concerto brilliantly to well-earned applause.

Intermission

Maestro Ponti reentered and with baton raised, began the second portion of tonight’s concert with Samuel Barber’s *Essay No. 1, op 12 (1937)* for strings. The Symphony performed this work with equal finesse as the Dvořák. While not as well-known as Barber’s *Adagio For Strings*, his *Essay No. 1* reflects many of the qualities associated with Barber’s orchestral treatments.

Jennifer Higdon’s *To the Point* was described by Maestro Ponti as a marvelous example of a work created with means similar to impressionist artist Seurat’s pointillism technique of painting with dots and small dashes. The parallels are clear and were effectively presented sonically in this exciting work. The arrangement of strings was particularly effective in projecting a desirable stereophonic projection of sound. It was a pleasure to hear work from a living, award-winning woman composer.

The final selection was a work by Ildebrando Pizzetti entitled *La Pisanella (1919)*. This is a charming piece that should be performed more often. We thank Maestro Ponti for bringing this somewhat obscure work to the forefront.

This was a marvelous concert. Maestro Ponti and the Punta Gorda Symphony represent musical jewels of the region’s artistic psyche for the many patrons, supporters, and lovers of fine music.



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Violinist Sirena Huang is a spectacular young talent with a bright future. She conquers passages teeming with difficulties with ease. Along with her ardor and dazzling facility, she projects a warm, rich sound. Her playing is sublime and expressive. She plays from the heart and projects a pathos with a sound that is alive and passionate.

Maestro Ponti introduces his music like best friends to his audience. Through his panoramic prose, he makes music vital and personal. His descriptions are insightful and poetic. His conducting is precise and expressive, drawing the best from the musicians and the music. His attention to detail is notable and he delights his audience by introducing less familiar important works.

The Symphony members met the challenges with assurance, supporting our featured violinist and partnering with Maestro Ponti to express the intent of the composers. Orchestral soloists emerged throughout the evening, using their voices to project and support the expressive properties of the music.

The house was packed this evening so don't hesitate in obtaining tickets.

You can purchase tickets for upcoming events here or at the Orchestra's website at <https://www.pgsymphony.org/>. For their season calendar go here or to <https://www.pgsymphony.org/calendar/>.

21/22 Season At A Glance

Mainstage Concerts

January 16, 2022: Dvořák Violin Concerto / CPAC

February 6, 2022: Copland Appalachian Spring & Rimsky-Korsakov Scheherazade / CPAC

March 6, 2022: Stravinsky The Firebird / CPAC

April 24, 2022: Get Happy! Joan Ellison Sings Judy Garland / Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center

Outdoor Chamber Series

February 20, 2022: Strings on the Lawn / Florida Southwestern State College Charlotte Campus

March 27, 2022: Harborside Brass / Lashley Park

About Edward Klizus

Performer, conductor, and educator Edward Klizus began his musical studies at the age of 5 and has since been deeply involved in the fine and performing arts. Long time and current member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) and American Federation of Musicians (AFM), he studied both piano and trumpet performance, and while at the Manhattan School of Music studied with Mel Broiles, principal trumpet of the New York Metropolitan Opera Orchestra at Lincoln Center. His post-graduate studies at New York University focused on trumpet and piano performance, music composition, and analysis of Elliott Carter's 1974 work Brass Quintet. He has performed at Manhattan's West Village venue Monologues and Madness and currently focuses his artistic and creative endeavors in writing, music composition, jazz piano, and reviewing music and theatre venues for The Front Row Center in New York NY, and OpeningNight.Online in sunny Florida.