

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

CONCERT REVIEW

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IRIS ends season on high note for GPAC audience

IRIS Chamber Orchestra's exclamatory season ended with bravos! ooohs! whoops! and hollers!

There was nothing staid about Saturday night's concert at the Germantown Performing Arts Centre. It blasted off with Copland's energetic "Music for the Theater," moved into higher drama with Mozart's Symphony No. 25 in G minor and ended with soloist Gil Shaham breathing fire into the Brahms Violin Concerto in D major.

Shaham was not just the star of the show, he was the Elvis. He coaxed magic from his Stradivarius as he grooved with the music, sometimes crouching, sometimes dancing, often sporting the smile of an artist engrossed in the creative act.

His stunning rendition of the cadenza in the first movement was worth the price of admission alone. The 33-year-old has performed since childhood, including a couple of stints in Memphis years ago with Artists Ascending. The warmth this region still holds for him was reflected in the numerous returns to the stage demanded by the ecstatic audience (and orchestra). He delivered an encore, a version of Bach's Gavotte from Partita No. 1 in E Major, that was deservedly received with about the same delirium as the Brahms.

But we must not slight the orchestra that, under its splendid baton, delivered nearly ideal performances of all three of its endeavors.

The fascinating Copland piece is an early work (1925), consciously American, full of jazz, vaudeville, hymnlike passages, wit and drama. Numerous soloists shone, but clarinetist Jerome Simas and oboist Ben Hausmann stood out.

Mozart was going for theatrical tension - Sturm und Drang as put it - in his Symphony No. 25. IRIS did an exquisite rendering, almost as perfect as November's performance of the composer's Symphony No. 40 - also in G minor. The horns strove mightily but faltered slightly in the Mozart and a bit more noticeably in the Brahms.

There was a certain giddiness at GPAC afterwards, the sort that typically attends the completion of a season. But it was amplified by the fact that this one had so many high points in soloists, orchestral performance and selection of works. And by the fact that next season promises to offer more of the same.

And that's why we holler "Bravo!"