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# RPO's 'Fire and Water' takes your breath away

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Written by Anna Reguero

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English conductor Sarah Ioannides, who currently leads two American orchestras, thought to name this week's pair of Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra concerts "Earth, Wind and Fire," after the classic rock band, she said from the stage prior to the performance Thursday night. But it would have left out Debussy's sea portrait, so the title is "Fire and Water."

However, astrology's four major elements of fire, earth, air and water would be a more apt description.

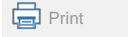
The RPO's program this week encapsulates just about every element it can squish into two hours. So much so that the concert felt overwhelmed, if such a thing is possible. With three great works in a row, all performed expertly, with an exquisite soloist and sophisticated guest conductor, it's a marathon of a concert that will leave you out of breath, as if you just spent two hours cycling downhill with the wind through your hair.

## If you go

What: Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra with Sarah Ioannides, guest conductor, and violinist Lara St. John.  
When: 8 tonight.  
Where: Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre, 60 Gibbs St.  
Cost: \$20 to \$75.  
For tickets: (585) 454-2100 or go to www.rpo.org.

To start, violin soloist Lara St. John gave a magnetic, free-wheeling U.S. premiere performance to a triumphant, half-hour-long violin concerto by Australian composer Matthew Hindson, which was followed by an intermission. Hindson's *Concerto for Violin, "Australian Postcards,"* is a three-part concerto that trips an audience around an Australian wind turbine landmark, a bleak rural town with failing industry and then into Australia's biggest sports day, where "your team wins, of course," prefaced Ioannides, who was born in Australia.

It's a loaded work, heroic in all it conveys. It's modern in techniques, with slides and held notes that droop and melt away, electronic-like string textures and more than just garden variety percussion. Yet its portraits and snapshots of places and events



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are so strong that this energetic work engages at every turn. The work occasionally goes off on tangents, though it is always interesting, if not always developed, material.

St. John is not the typical, manicured virtuoso. She dares to go past the niceties of violin playing to pull out a raw performance with an expressive freedom that's rare. In a yellow and brown ragged dress (already a dangerous look), she dove around the three-part work like a hawk, from its frenzied runs to its fiddle-like melodies. And the orchestra, which has a hefty role in this concerto, mastered a difficult and face-forward accompaniment, led with concise, clear conducting by Ioannides.

It was enough of a work to satisfy for an entire concert. But there were two other major works to be heard; the thought alone was exhausting.

Debussy's *La Mer*, the composer's most majestic work, was dessert.

And by the time the orchestra finished its ravishing and authoritative version of Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite*, the audience ran out of steam for the overwhelming applause and ovations that usually follows this impressive orchestral work.

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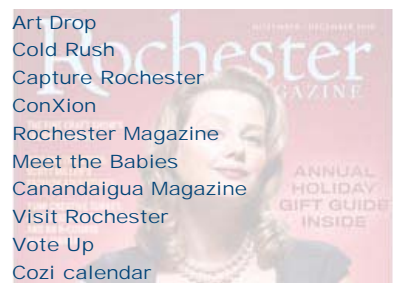


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