

# A TOUR DE FORCE OF SONIC SPLENDOR

Review by [Steve Osborn](#)  
[Classical Sonoma](#)

[Santa Rosa Symphony / Sunday, March 23, 2014](#)

Bruno Ferrandis, conductor. Santa Rosa Symphony Youth Orchestra.  
Paul Silverthorne, viola.

On paper the Santa Rosa Symphony's March 23 concert in Weill Hall looked promising and even provocative, with a world-premiere concerto, a famous solo violist and two flashy Russian orchestral works. But as often is the case, in unexpected ways the whole was not equal to the sum of the parts.

Behzad Ranjbaran's new viola concerto was written for the Symphony and the eminent British violist, Paul Silverthorne, and closed the concert's first half before 1,200 on yet another balmy Sonoma County Sunday afternoon. Silverthorne, surprisingly playing from score, displayed in the opening Adagio a warm lower register and, for expressive effect, lots of tiny slides into notes. Ranjbaran makes use of a large orchestra, with plentiful interplay of marimba, xylophone, celesta and harp. Flutist Kathleen Lane Reynolds played prominent mellifluous short notes and what sounded like chirps. As a composer, Ranjbaran is a master orchestrator and a canny exploiter of unique tone colors.

In the central Largo movement, the solo part had double stops and virtuoso phrasing in an often sad lament, but as in the first and last movements, Silverthorne could not effectively project above the orchestra's weighty sound. There were no pyrotechnics here, and conductor Bruno Ferrandis shaped the ensemble in music reminiscent of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony. Muted trumpets and the marimbist Stan Muncy gave the music a somber air. The duo between Silverthorne and violinist Jay Zhong was lively, the two string lines ending the movement in a captivating hush.

Without pause, the concerto was off and running into an Allegro vivace, the playing angry at times and with short snippets of themes. Instead of a conventional symphonic long line, Ranjbaran juxtaposes short melodic statements in many guises. Silverthorne played his viola splendidly but was again outgunned against the orchestral fabric. At the end, Ranjbaran joined Silverthorne and Ferrandis on stage to loud applause.

To open the concert, members of the Santa Rosa Symphony Youth Orchestra paired with the Symphony in a scrappy and boisterous performance of a chestnut, Borodin's "Polovtsian Dances" from the opera "Prince Igor." There was expert playing by oboe, English horn and harp, and even a piquant sound from the tambourine. As good as dances were, the showpiece of the day was the closing work, Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade." Ferrandis, in complete control all afternoon, was at his consummate best in this glorious display of symphonic prowess.

Hardly looking at the score, Ferrandis guided a cacophonous but shapely performance that was a feast for the first-chair players in almost every section. If the Ranjbaran was a concerto for viola, the Rimsky was one for the orchestra. Mention must be made of the glamorous playing from clarinetist Roy Zajac, cellist Adelle-Akiko Kearns, oboist Laura Reynolds, flutists Stacey Pelinka and Ms. Reynolds, hornist Caitlyn Smith, trumpeters Doug Morton and Scott Macomber, timpanist Andrew Lewis, and percussionist Allen Biggs. Concertmaster Zhong's long solo passages, depicting the young Scheherazade, were played in an understated manner and traded lyricism for power, all to a good end.

Rising above this tour de force of sonic splendor was the dominating baton and vision of the conductor. After the final tutti, Ferrandis was liberal in acknowledging the sections and leaders, each getting a roar of audience approval.