

Celebrate symphony

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Tuesday's LaGrange Symphony Orchestra concert was billed as an "American Celebration."

It was more than that. It was America at its best.

From the opening "Star Spangled Banner" until the final note of the final encore, the performance showcased a rich diversity of talent and music that would have been impressive on any stage and was truly astonishing for a small Georgia city.

Conductor Patricio Cobos, a native of Chile, introduced the national anthem by noting the coincidence that the concert, planned long ago, was held on "Super Tuesday." In his charming accent, he praised his adopted country for the wonderful life it has afforded him. Numerous others on the program could have said the same thing. The orchestra includes Columbus State students from Europe, Africa and Israel.

Composer Douglas R. Hooker, a Georgia Tech-trained engineer, had the joy of hearing his first orchestral piece, Sinai Symphony, expertly performed between compositions by American masters Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland. Hooker, who is African-American, was joined in the audience by dozens of relatives and friends, some of them from LaGrange. It was a proud moment for all.

LaGrange's own Emily Landa, a gifted mezzo-soprano, performed Copland's difficult songs of Emily Dickinson poems with a confidence born on the LaGrange High stage and nurtured through extensive professional training. After a stunning, surprise duet with her fiancé, she accepted flowers from her proud father, symphony board president Scott Landa. The emotional wallop of the moment elevated the evening.

The orchestra stirred the audience with Gould's "American Salute," a series of variations on "Johnny Comes Marching Home" that was both dramatic and toe-tapping. And the violin duet encore, featuring two young musicians from Israel performing a Spanish composition, put an international exclamation point on an all-American event.

"American Celebration" provided convincing proof that LaGrange should truly celebrate its symphony. Ours is not the only small town in the USA with a symphony, but it is rare and revealing that our small city has a symphony with global reach and world class outreach. This year, the LSO launched a children's string music project in collaboration with its Lafayette Youth Orchestra and LaGrange College. Next month, the symphony will host entertainer Fred Newman as narrator for both a family concert and their annual children's concerts for hundreds of students in Troup and Valley, Ala. schools.

The LaGrange Symphony Orchestra prides itself on producing classical sounds with a Southern flair.

This week, the American celebration concert brought the world to LaGrange.

What could be more American than that.

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