

Monday, April 9th

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## F.C. Episcopal's Organ Up to the Task of Saint-Saens' 3rd Symphony.

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By [Nicholas F. Benton](#)



CONDUCTOR Miriam Burns (center) and the entire Tysons McLean Orchestra take a bow following their rendition of the Organ Symphony Saturday night at the Falls Church Episcopal. (Photo: News-Press)

If there is one word to describe Camille Saint-Saens' Third Symphony, known as the Organ Symphony, it would be "big." Some have said that it would fill the Grand Canyon with its sound. Truly, it is a reason why I tell friends that they haven't experienced that work until they see it performed live. No recording can really do it justice.

That being said, that big, big symphony was not too big for the mighty organ and the perfect acoustics of the main, newer sanctuary of the Falls Church Episcopal Church, where the talented Tysons McLean Orchestra took up the challenge of the amazing work last Saturday night. If there was anything lacking in the concert, it was only that more people weren't there to enjoy it. The performance deserved to have been done to a standing room only audience to match the standing ovation it received.

Conductor Miriam Burns handled the hanging together and powerful energies of the work with enthusiastic vigor. Being a huge Organ Symphony fan, I delighted in how Burns made it work beautifully because she didn't hold anything back. It's loud and boisterous, and it's supposed to be, but also melodic and beautiful. You're supposed to get goose bumps from it, in the finest romantic tradition, and they were there in abundance.

The magnificent organ in that venue was handled with great skill by Julie Huang Tucker, aided by her role as its master every week as the church's resident organist. The organ there is so powerful that it makes the whole sanctuary vibrate with even its softest tones, so the audience could clearly hear its subtle contributions to an early movement of the work that are easy to miss in recordings, especially before the big blast opens the breathtaking crash-boom-blasts of the final movement.

Saint-Saens (1835-1921) said he wrote the symphony at the height of his powers in 1886 to counter the influence of the prevailing musical fad of the time, which was the opera. He said he wanted to create something every bit as breathtaking as the powerful operas of his day, and this work did the trick. It included everything in it but the kitchen sink, and it is often performed with a considerably larger orchestra than what the Tysons McLean people could fit into the Falls Church Episcopal sanctuary Saturday night. I was a bit amazed that they'd even try, but everyone there was surely pleased they did.

Not only was the audience small, but the concert was limited to a single performance. I suggest that as a tribute to the great organ in that church, that the symphony be done annually. That venue and the work compliment each other so well, under this orchestra's leadership, that it could become a great new tradition.

I know I'd be there every time. And it would qualify as a religious experience to fit the church's agenda, too. In her program notes, Burns wrote the Third Symphony has the power to "transport us to the heavens."

Saturday's concert also included performances of Brahms' Tragic Overture and Tchaikovsky's Variations on a Rococo Theme, accompanied deftly and passionately by cellist Sebastian Baverstam.

The Tysons McLean Orchestra was at the Falls Church Episcopal with a performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 and Schubert's Symphony No. 9 ("The Great") last fall, and we hope they will be back, and often, in their next season. Their last concert of this season is at the Vinson Hall in McLean on May 19 that will be highlighted by Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture.

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