

# CLASSICAL MUSIC

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## Alexandria Symphony Orchestra

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Call your first concert of the season "Exhilaration," then begin and end it with the "Dies Irae" -- the famous melody of death and the Day of Judgment? What was the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra thinking?

Sheer sonic splendor must have been high on its list. The performance, on Saturday night at Schlesinger Concert Hall in Alexandria, opened with Liszt's "Totentanz," featuring pianist Carlos Rodriguez. Extracting huge sound from his instrument, Rodriguez seemed not so much to play the piano as attack it, pounding it into submission. It was a thrilling performance, with conductor Kim Allen Kluge and the orchestra providing enthusiastic backup. Rodriguez was not totally convincing in the work's one extended lyrical section, but this piece is mostly fireworks, and he set them all off.

The near-capacity crowd's thunderous applause brought Rodriguez back for a brief respite in the form of Liszt's nocturne "Liebestraum."

Debussy's familiar "La Mer" focused on the interplay of music and movement that Kluge said the orchestra will explore all season. Here, a few weaknesses in individual sections disappeared when everyone played together. The concluding "Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea," with its ominous opening and tension-filled buildup to the final storm, was especially effective.

Rachmaninoff's last composition, "Symphonic Dances," completed the program. Originally -- and perhaps more aptly -- called "Fantastic Dances," the work features some gloriously indulgent string themes, which sounded a bit diffuse. Faster sections were much more potent, and the final juxtaposition of the "Dies Irae" with a resurrection theme from the composer's "All-Night Vigil" made for a spectacular finish.

-- [Mark J. Estren](#)

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