

# Musical foliage colors GNSO concert

By James Cotter  
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After a season of glorious fall foliage, "Orchestral Colors" with the Greater Newburgh Symphony Orchestra illuminated Aquinas Hall at Mount Saint Mary College Saturday evening. Conductor Michael Avagliano, one of four candidates to be the next leader of the orchestra, planned the program and led the concert with the theme of changing styles, moods, tones and range of instruments and composers from light to tragic, slow to swift, earthy to heavenly. Avagliano conducted with expert hands-on attention, at ease and drawing the best timing and precision from his players. He brought to bear his wide background as a maestro.

In his pre-concert talk Gordon Shacklett proved again to be a helpful guide by illustrating themes and variations on the piano. Avagliano himself provided introductions to each work by summarizing its history and its unique style and context.

Respighi's "Ancient Airs and Dances, Suite 1" (1917) offers modern orchestral settings for four 16th century lute works, beginning with a "Balletto" by Simone Molinaro. The Renaissance dance is sprightly and syncopated with

repeated high string cadences accompanied by drone bass. The second movement, Vincenzo Galilei's "Gagliarda," starts off with quicksilver scales, then slows to a pastoral theme announced by the oboe over low strings. The third and fourth movements are by anonymous composers: "Villanella" features pizzicato strings followed by an oboe and harp duet, and the final "Mascherada" skips and hops to a happy, tuneful conclusion. Four delightfully lighthearted pieces were perfectly played.

Faure's "Pelleas et Melisande Suite" (1909) moves into a different realm, a mysterious fairyland where lovers meet and die. "Prelude" sets the scene with tranquil chords and a distant hunting horn followed by a cello announcing the maiden's presence. "La Fileuse" finds her at her spinning wheel with upper strings and solo oboe depicting her rhythmic motion and a horn and clarinet picturing the lovers. "Sicilienne" features a lovely melody and rising harmony as flute and harp converse. Melisande's death is shown in the final movement with soft funereal phrases and a moving elegy that is less a dirge than a tender farewell. Leader and orchestra again demonstrated the range and beauty of works with similar instrumentation and entirely differing effects.

After intermission, Dvorak's Symphony No. 7 in D minor (1885) offered listeners a further experience of live music with full sound and deep emotion. Inspired by his mentor Brahms' Third Symphony, Dvorak set out to compose a work of probing challenges. The opening allegro begins immediately with disturbing chords, ominous, stark and dramatic, that break off to a second theme that is lyrical, developing a three-note motif that reappears throughout. In true sonata form, the recapitulation returns to the first emphatic chords. The adagio starts with a woodwind chorale of solemn tenor, then strings lead a second theme and brass a third. A robust tutti brings the three together in a forceful climax. The scherzo changes pace and mood with rapid counter melodies in triple meter. The final allegro echoes the opening foreboding chords continued in the minor key, but builds to a resonant major and triumphant close. A standing ovation rewarded Avagliano and players for a memorable musical evening.

The next concert is on Jan. 16 at 3 p.m. at Mount Saint Mary College and features guest conductor David Bernard in a multi-media production of Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade."