

Orchestra's gala season opener lives up to the hype

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By Drue Ferguson*

The Rochester Symphony Orchestra & Chorale launched its 92nd season in style Saturday night. A festive atmosphere was created by the first-ever combination of gala events with season opener.

Ending the first half of the program, Lantz announced that the evening's guest artist, St. Paul native and pianist Andrew Staupe, had won a Pro Musicis International Award, which provides the opportunity for him to present concerts in Boston, Los Angeles and Paris and at Carnegie Hall in New York.

Staupe lived up to the hype. His playing was able to encompass, in a matter of seconds, precise and almost mechanical force, impish playfulness, twinkling delicacy, bullet-like octaves and rhapsodic singing in Rachmaninoff's "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini." (The link to the Americana theme is that the composer lived for many years in the United States after the Russian revolution.) Piano and orchestra were tightly woven throughout, especially in Variation VII.



At the end, the audience jumped to its feet in a flurry of bravos. When Staupe returned to the stage, he told the audience that his sister, a cellist in the orchestra, had recently married and that, when they were growing up, they had been dance partners and performed in musicals. He played "Till There Was You" from "The Music Man" for her, with a big hug afterward.

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