

Philip Mann

Conducts the New Mexico Philharmonic

in Walton, Prokofiev, Dvorak *"a beautifully sculptured performance"*

Review: William Walton Concerto for Viola

By [D.S. Crafts / For the Journal](#)

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To this day the viola has not received its due. A gorgeous, mid-range instrument between the violin and cello, it remains the butt of juvenile jokes, the kind formerly used to slur ethnic people. Actually, many prefer the sound of the viola to the violin because of its lower range — alto rather than soprano.

Last Saturday night New Mexico Philharmonic violist Kim Fredenburgh performed the William Walton Concerto for Viola along with guest conductor Philip Mann. With her rhapsodic playing Fredenburgh makes an admirable and most persuasive case for the neglected beauty of her instrument.

Significant concertos for the viola are sadly few and far between. The Romantic period (except for Hector Berlioz) all but ignored the instrument as soloist. In the 20th century Béla Bartók left his concerto an unfinished torso, and Paul Hindemith's (*Der Schwanendreher*) is barely worth listening to.

Walton's is clearly the best in the repertoire, though it too had no easy road to acceptance. But here again, Fredenburgh's playing makes a powerful argument in the work's defense, full of lyric mastery and the understanding of a singer.

The first movement, *Andante comodo*, a concentrated sonata form, allowed Fredenburgh to begin immediately with a warm resonance as the music hovers between major and minor tonality, reflecting the bittersweet quality of the instrument itself. Dynamics were kept relatively even allowing the color of the viola to shine through. Precisely because it is a mid-range instrument, a viola, can be too easily lost in an extroverted orchestral fabric.

Never allowing Fredenburgh to be overpowered, Mann gave an effective swing to the jazzy syncopations reminiscent of Sergei Prokofiev, whom Walton greatly admired. The *Vivo* bristled with insistent rhythmic energy, crowned by some exclamatory outbursts from the horns. Fredenburgh played nearly continuously throughout the work until the brilliant orchestral outburst midway through the final *Allegro moderato*. A tour de force for all concerned for which the audience stood and applauded with obvious affection.

Prokofiev's *Overture on Hebrew Themes*, originally a chamber work, he later scored for orchestra. Oddly, the sections between the folk melodies sound almost French in character. One might have difficulty identifying this piece as by Prokofiev. The extensive clarinet part in the chamber version is here spread out amongst the winds. Mann used subtle shifts of dynamic



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contrast in displaying the Russian's ever-original use of the orchestra.

Antonin Dvorák's Eighth and penultimate symphony comprised the second half. Mann led the orchestra in a beautifully sculptured performance capturing the myriad mix of emotion throughout. The Allegretto grazioso, a symphonic waltz, danced with grace and polish. The final Allegro ma non troppo ranged masterfully from tender to boisterous. Particular praise must go to the cello section, led by Joan Zucker, opulently executing the many melodies Dvorák gives it.