

# Please disconnect all cell phones, signal watches, and pagers

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Raymond Chen

Last Saturday night, a group of us (including [butt photographer Wendy](#)) attended a [performance of the Seattle Symphony](#) consisting of the world premiere of the orchestral arrangement of Shafer Mahoney's *Sparkle*, Richard Strauss' *Don Quixote* (with guest soloist Lynn Harrell) and concluding with Brahms' Fourth Symphony. I was pleasantly surprised by the Mahoney. World premieres are a hit or miss affair (mostly miss), but *Sparkle* had wit and direction. It had the feel of an overture, because when it was over, I was expecting Act One to start. And even today, I can remember bits and pieces of it. If only all world premieres had such stickiness.

I didn't have high hopes for *Don Quixote* either, but for the opposite reason from *Sparkle*: Instead of being apprehensive for the unknown, I was dreading the known. In my opinion, the piece merely rambles on and on, and last night's performance... rambled on and on. About a quarter of the way through, the muffled electronic tones of a cell phone could be heard. Imagine our surprise when the guest soloist himself reached into his jacket pocket, pulled out his mobile telephone, and disengaged the ringer! My seats were in the center of the third row, so I had an excellent view of this surreal scene. (The first-desk second violins, who were counting rests at the time, found this rather amusing.)

The final piece was reassuringly Brahms. I wallowed in the melancholy of the falling thirds and the lyricism of the Andante, and smiled to myself whenever I caught the opening theme returning in a different guise. The performance seemed to rush in places, during which the orchestra had some difficulty keeping together, but I was satisfied overall. (Of the four symphonies, this one has the weakest ending, in my opinion. It feels like he went, "Oh, right this is the last variation, I should put a big chord here.")

It so happens that my seat was positioned such that I was in the line of sight of the second first violin as well as the second second violin. When they were looking at their music, they were looking pretty much directly at me; it was kind of creepy. I could see their eyes dart from the music to their stand partner to the conductor. Both of them are long-time symphony members so I recognized them quickly enough, but my previous seats were much further away, so I only knew them from afar. Up close, I could read the expressions on their

faces. The second first is really their acting concertmaster who sits second because the Seattle Symphony is auditioning for a permanent concertmaster after a messy break-up with the previous concertmaster. She was all business, hardly cracking a smile the entire time; this is something that is completely lost on me when I'm in the upper orchestra much less the third balcony. (I had to scour the program to figure out who the guest concertmaster was this evening. Elisabeth Adkins' name was dropped into the program incidentally in a paragraph attributed to Gerard Schwarz. She wasn't listed as a guest artist or in the orchestra roster. It appears that Ms. Adkins is a finalist in the concertmaster search. She did a fine job on stage, but the real work of the concertmaster is behind the scenes, so I don't know how well she fared there.)

Here's what Wendy had to say about the concert.

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