

# Happening to be at the same post-concert restaurant as symphony performers

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Getting out of the parking garage immediately after the symphony ends is usually a bit of an ordeal, so my symphony group tends to linger downtown for some coffee or dessert, allowing time for the post-symphony traffic jams to clear out. The other night, we went to the Union restaurant just a block from Benaroya Hall. (Verdict: Not a good dessert restaurant.)

After we placed our orders, violinists Elisa Barston (my current “favorite symphony performer”) and Mikhail Shmidt came in and were seated at the table next to us. I tried not to stare, but even though I’ve sat quite close to Elisa Barston before, this time I was even closer. (There were two other people at their table, but I couldn’t tell who they were because they were facing away from me.)

As another coincidence, it was during the concert we had just attended that Mikhail Shmidt dropped his bow. I didn’t see it occur; my guess is that it fell off his lap during a pizzicato section. It was during a relatively loud part of the piece so you had to be pretty close to the stage to hear it fall. I heard the clatter, looked over, and saw the violinist calmly bend over and pick it up. He and his standmate played the next few bars with smiles on their faces, clearly amused by the minor snafu, something to make the performance of an orchestral warhorse a bit more memorable. (I have to admit, I was amused too.)

One thing I noticed was that whereas my group was out for dessert and coffee, the symphony performers were having dinner. Makes sense. During a performance, you don’t want to be overcome by indigestion, a food coma, or an urgent call of nature. (Or receive a phone call for that matter.)

As we got up to leave, a member of our group struck her head on a low-hanging lamp. In the brief hubbub, Elisa Barston reassured us, “That’s okay, I hit my head on that lamp all the time.” Which means either that she comes to Union often, or (more likely) she just said that to make us feel less embarrassed.

This was the third time we found ourselves at the same post-concert restaurant as a symphony performer.

0. I saw Joshua Roman heading into Wild Ginger.

1. Gerard Schwarz was having drinks in the lounge at Union.

2. Maria Larionoff, Gerard Schwarz, the evening's guest soloist, and a number of other people sat at a large round table near ours at The Capital Grill.

3. Elisa Barston, Mikhail Shmidt, and two others having dinner at Union.

I guess if I see Susan Gulkis Assadi at a post-symphony restaurant, I'll have completed the entire set of string section principals. (I'm ignoring principal bass, because, well, everybody does...)

I counted Joshua Roman as a zero in the list above, since we saw him go in, but we were heading to Purple, so it didn't count as a "same restaurant" encounter.

**Bonus chatter 1:** I happened to have attended the open rehearsal for this same concert earlier in the week, so I got to hear the second piece on the program performed two-and-a-half times: The first time was by the orchestra without soloist. Then with the soloist. The *-and-a-half* was all the fragments the conductor rehearsed repeatedly. This was an interesting way to be exposed to the piece for the first time: Hearing the orchestral part first biased my reaction to the piece. Instead of hearing it as a violin concerto, I perceived it more as an orchestral work with solo violin accompaniment. Other interesting things from the rehearsal:

- String section leaders have much better access to the conductor than other sections. During the rehearsal, the concertmaster and principal second had brief chats with the conductor without even leaving their seats. By comparison, the piccolo player had to hang around near the podium to catch the conductor's attention as he returned from a break.
- It's an interesting contrast seeing the soloist turn up for the rehearsal in jeans, pink shirt, ponytail, and glasses. Whereas for the performance, she's in a blue dress and wearing contacts. (But she still had the ponytail.)
- The rehearsal ends promptly at 12:30. Right in the middle of a phrase, boom, everything stops. Union rules.

**Bonus chatter 2:** I was tempted to title this entry *When out on the stage there arose such a clatter*, but the dropped bow was such a small part of the article, and the clatter was relatively insignificant, so it would have been a bit of a misrepresentation.

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