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Alsop is the life of the concert

Marc Shulgold, Rocky Mountain News

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Barely 24 hours earlier, Marin Alsop had presided at an exciting night of modern masterworks by Steve Reich. But on Friday night, it was time to return to the safe world of concert-hall favorites.

Nothing wrong with that - not when the Colorado Symphony's conductor laureate injects as much energy as she did before a large and enthusiastic audience in Boettcher Hall.

This was a program of classical-radio hits: Dukas' *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Debussy's *Afternoon of a Faun* and Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. Plus a lush, romantic violin concerto by Max Bruch.

No, not the First Concerto - the one in G minor with all those great tunes. We'll have to wait until April, when a fiddler named Perlman comes to town.

Instead, we heard Bruch's lesser-known Second Concerto. This is the one in D-minor - the one without *any* great tunes.

Here is a piece that is all dressed up to look and sound like a violin concerto, complete with soulful passages, snazzy cadenzas and lots of big orchestral accompaniment.

And not much in the way of substance. Still, it proved a grateful vehicle for CSO associate concertmaster Claude Sim, who won over his listeners with a poised account that served to show off his lustrous tone and solid technique. Alsop and company provided a technicolor accompaniment and everything went smoothly. Yet, the mind tended to wander - as did Bruch's often unfocused writing.

Those friendly warhorses on the remainder of the program were elevated above the predictable and routine, thanks to Alsop. Every moment was important, even the ones that usually call up memories of Disney.

Dukas' *Sorcerer's Apprentice* unfolded with a tension and drama not often encountered. So richly detailed was this reading that Mickey and his oversize robe never crept into our thoughts.

Similarly, Debussy's evocative *Afternoon of a Faun* sounded fresh and inviting, featuring some lovely flute-playing from Pam Endsley. If the pace was a tad slow, Alsop never let the music turn tedious.

Nothing draggy about the concluding Elgar *Enigma Variations*. Bravely conducting from memory (as she did in the Debussy), Alsop put a charge into this colorful score, inspiring some breathtaking ensemble work from the brass and a lively rhythmic pulse that never let up.

One watched with admiration how she commanded the stage, maintaining a clear beat, driving her players to deliver just a bit more. In the gorgeous *Nimrod* Variation, she spread her arms wide and pulled out some first-rate playing.

Alsop never takes the music for granted - and we should never take her talent and innate musicality for granted, either.

Colorado Symphony

- **Grade:** A-
- **When and where:** repeated at 7:30 p.m. today and 2:30 p.m. Sunday in Boettcher Hall, 14th and Curtis streets
- **Cost:** \$15 to \$65
- **Information:** 303-623-7876
- **Of Note:** Marin Alsop conducts Dukas, Bruch, Debussy and Elgar

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