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CSO's new principal cellist struts her stuff

Welcome, Louise

By Lindsay Koob

Friday was an utterly rotten day for me — that is, until I got to the Sottile Theatre for the Charleston Symphony's latest Backstage Pass concert that evening — entitled "Louise" — where I was reminded that even bad days can end well. The opening number — modern American master John Corigliano's *To Music* — was just what the doctor ordered.

It's based on a beloved art-song by Franz Schubert that sings of music's power to calm and console in the face of life's pain and stress. Assorted brass players were stationed around the hall, in earnest dialogue with the orchestra. Recurring snippets of the original melody abounded as the music spoke eloquently of both travail and relief — fascinating stuff. Resident conductor Scott Terrell and his assured players did it full justice.

From there, it was on to the music of two dependable Czech tunesmiths, beginning with two delightful short pieces for solo cello and orchestra by Antonin Dvorak. Here, the star of the show was the CSO's recently appointed principal cellist, Louise Dubin — in her first solo gig with her new band.

First came *Silent Woods*, a small gem that reeks of plaintive Slavic pathos. The next item was his better-known Rondo in G Minor: certainly a livelier piece, but still full of the sweet, aching melodies and harmonies that Dvorak seems to have a patent on.

Dubin was in top form, beguiling our ears and touching our hearts with sonorous and sensitive playing. The mellow sound of a solo cello is easy to drown out, but Terrell and Dubin's new colleagues furnished the kind of soft but scintillating backup that let us hear her every note.

It all ended with a bang, with a spirited item from one of Dvorak's most inspired successors, Leos Janacek. The six movements of his tuneful *Lachian Dances* grew from his early collections of native folk music. These charming pieces owe much to Dvorak's smash-hit *Slavonic Dances*, but reveal more rough-hewn, authentic folk-flavors.

Terrell and company did right by them, too — playing with skill and infectious verve. The only minor flaws I caught were an early moment of disjuncture between the strings and brasses and a bobbled horn-note down the road. It's about time we heard more from Janacek: one of his nation's most original and colorful composers.

But the evening's main significance was to assure us that Louise is filling the sizeable shoes of James Holland — the CSO's esteemed former lead cellist — very ably.

As for me, I felt a whole lot better about my day on my way out than on my way in. —*Lindsay Koob*