LIFE

The Energy of Musical Storytelling: UConn's Symphony Orchestra performs its annual debut



The University of Connecticut's Symphony Orchestra performs in J. Louis von der Mehden Recital Hall on Oct. 13, 2026. The audience's applause echoed in the room after every piece.

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Campus may have felt quiet to those out enjoying the fall breeze Tuesday evening, but just inside the doors of the J. Louis von der Mehden Recital Hall, there was so much to be heard. The University of Connecticut's Symphony Orchestra stunned in its first concert of the year on Oct. 13.

As audience members filtered in, orchestra members began to occupy the stage and settle into playing positions. A small boy bounced up and down in his chair in the front row, undoubtedly feeling the great tension which built in the auditorium as a crescendo of tuning musicians arose.

The symphony began with a rendition of Adolphus Hailstork's "Epitaph for a Man who Dreamed," a tribute to Martin Luther King Jr. Composed in 1979, Hailstork's work felt more important than ever as the energy of historical legacy rose climactically in the hands of string instrumentalists. The eyes of everyone in von der Mehden widened as they felt the strength of the sounds around them.

Listeners could not have predicted what they were in for as Solomiya Ivakhiv, professor of violin at UConn, walked onto stage. She commanded the attention of performers and spectators alike as the orchestra played Max Bruch's deeply personal and intimate "First Violin Concerto." Known as one of the most rich and deeply expressive works of the Romantic era, this piece was done justice by these talented musicians. Bows moved in unison and eyes were fixed on Ivakhiv as melodies flowed from her violin.

Crashing applause concluded each piece as beaming faces looked to one another. Multiple generations stood as one, taking photos of their loved ones on stage and clapping so hard that their hands grew sore.

At intermission, an upright bass player reported on the first half of the show: "I've played better, I made a few mistakes." As an observer, nothing about this performance seemed unintentional. Each member concentrated with great determination and the entire stage was alive with glowing parts of a well-oiled machine. The stand-up bassists in particular were a visually noticeable section, standing as solemn as the brick wall behind them while strumming the foundation of each composition.

The concert closed with Rimsky-Korsakov's epic reading of the "Tales of the Thousand and One Nights, Scheherazade." It seemed almost a discussion without words across percussion, brass, strings and woodwinds. Bassoons spoke to cellos who encouraged tubas. A clarinet solo was decorated with flutters of flute. A harp's song transcended the stillness of the cement ground beneath us. Each musician responded to one another while maintaining strength and volume alone.

Antonio Aviles Figueroa, a student violinist, stood before his section to astonish the crowd with a spectacular cadenza. It seemed his instrument was an extension of his body, the way he moved so intentionally. The entirety of two rows roared for Figueroa at the conclusion of this piece. Each soloist was met with well-deserved praise.

Director and Conductor Dr. Paul R. McShee looked as if his baton may just fly out of his hand throughout the piece. He guided the array of musicians with great passion and design, and it was clear how strong the bond formed between them was.

The Symphony Orchestra's performance on Tuesday night was one to be remembered.



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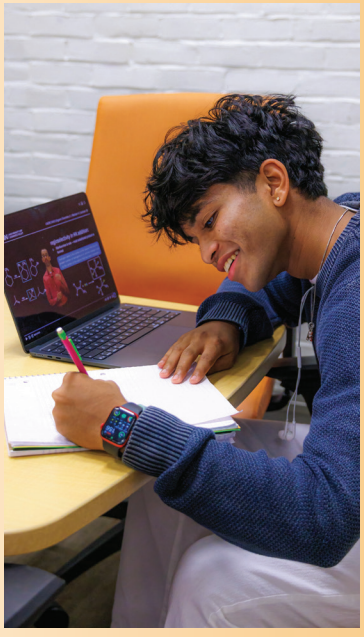
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"Drake"

Mohnish Srivatsav
Finance
Third Semester



"Drake"

Manas Ghanta
Molecular and Cellular Biology
First Semester



"Bad Bunny"

Valeria Limardo-Vazquez
Mechanical Engineering
First Semester



"Young Miko"

Emma Salazar
Biomedical Engineering
First Semester