

# RPO pulls off musical excellence on the fly

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## ABSTRACT

English conductor James Judd, former director of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, stepped in as an assured force on the podium and brought along Tchaikovsky's turbulent and stormy work, Francesca da Rimini, based on Dante's Inferno. Since the work is "full of loud and exciting sounds" that might overpower the rest of the program, he said from the stage, he switched it around with the night's ending headliner, Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade.

## FULL TEXT

Music can take you from Europe to Asia and through rungs of hell -- all from your concert seat. That's what happened at Thursday evening's Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra concert at Kodak Hall, which repeats tonight.

But the concert's destination points, tour guide and other details remained a question up until the start of the concert. The program went through numerous changes in the last couple of weeks, from scheduled soloists, to a change in conductor and repertoire -- and finally, announced from the stage, a change in program order.

Visa issues held up the originally scheduled conductor, David Robert Coleman, associate conductor at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, Germany, and French soprano Anaik Morel, says RPO officials.

Despite the musical chairs played before the concert, the orchestra pulled it together for a riveting evening.

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Opening with the Scheherazade was a bold experiment.

Based on the Arabian Nights tale, where a princess' nightly storytelling prowess keeps her alive for 1,001 consecutive nights until the violent sultan falls in love and marries her, Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade is an enchanting work filled with brilliant orchestra color and sweeping, exotic melody -- and it's almost always saved for last on a concert.

Hearing it first felt like eating dessert before dinner.

Judd conducted with expansive motions, allowing the musicians freedom to steal time.

The work is also notorious for the solos it affords nearly every principal member of the orchestra, and even through

some of the tricky finger patterns, each came through as standouts.

Even so, principal bassoonist Abraham Weiss performed with particular musical freedom. Hornist W. Peter Kurau's tone filled the hall with warmth. Concertmaster Juliana Athayde, whose solos represent the leading lady, Scheherazade, performed her cadenza interludes resolutely, and nailed the intonation in the final measures.

The major consideration in the program switch was Ravel's Sheherazade, a lighter, glistening orchestration of poems on the exotic Arabian tale, which was to be performed before the intermission.

Instead, the work opened the second half with soprano Christina Pier, whose full, dark voice carried easily above the orchestra. The RPO couldn't have had a lot of time to work on Tchaikovsky, but, under Judd, the musicians read down the fiery work with all the romantic fury it needed to be a successful addition and powerful close to the concert.

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If you go

What: Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, performing Tchaikovsky, Ravel and Rimsky-Korsakov, with conductor James Judd and soprano Christina Pier.

When: 8 tonight.

Where: Eastman Theatre, 60 Gibbs St.

Tickets: \$20 to \$75.

For information: (585) 454-2100 or [www.rpo.org](http://www.rpo.org).

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