

MUSIC REVIEW

Orchestra's guest cellist adds vibrant tone to performance

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SPECIAL TO

THE DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Some have said that the cello has such a moving sound because, of all the string instruments, it's closest in tone to the human voice. Acclaimed cello soloist Julie Albers made her vintage Vuillaume instrument speak eloquently in performance with the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra in the Masterworks IV concert Saturday night at the Robinson Center Music Hall in Little Rock.

Albers performed Edward Elgar's introspective *Cello Concerto in E Minor, Op. 85* (a 1919 meditation on the tragedy of World War I that, decades later, made a star of cellist Jacqueline du Pre). Striking a balance between passion and control, the emotional force of the guest soloist's playing was nothing less than inspired throughout the four-movement piece.

In her opening solo "Adagio" recitative and her interplay with the violas and then the orchestra, Albers was mesmerizing. The fourth-movement "Allegro" brought about a fusion of soloist and orchestra under the baton of conductor Philip Mann that was distinguished by its ferocity and precision.

Contrasting with the darkness of the Elgar concerto was Samuel Barber's spright-

ly waspish *Overture to The School for Scandal*, a work that somehow always seems fresh. Mann's direction brought out a sly underlying smoothness that enabled the brisk musical "gossip" to be passed from section to section all the more pointedly.

Filling the second half of the program was Felix Mendelssohn's *Symphony No. 5 in D Major, Op. 107 (Reformation)*. Mann and the orchestra seemed possessed of a joined energy; together they gave a vigorous account of this rather undervalued masterpiece. The various iterations and inversions of the "Dresden Amen" and "A Mighty Fortress" were

handled with a mounting assertiveness and assurance, and the concluding phrases were just this side of sublime.

The orchestra and guest soloist Albers will repeat the concert at 3 p.m. today at Robinson Center Music Hall, West Markham Street and Broadway. Ticket information is available by calling (501) 666-1761 or at the website, arkansassymphony.org.