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Emmanuel Ceysson, Harpist

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Symphony wraps up season on high note

By Patricia Wetzel

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The final concert of the El Paso Symphony Orchestra's 2007-08 season, under the direction of Maestra Sarah Ioannides, was a glorious combination of well-known romantic favorites, a virtuosic harp performance and the American premiere of a groundbreaking new work.

With perhaps one of the most celebrated solo passages in orchestral literature, flutist Melissa Colgin-Abeln masterfully introduced the opening of Debussy's "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" with the familiar dreamy melody.

The theme then traveled through the wind principals who all provided magnificent renderings. Ioannides delivered a passionately felt presentation that was filled with colorful crescendos and the delicate rising and falling of instrumentation. It was a lush and expressive performance.

The French influence continued with the Concerto for Harp and Orchestra in C by French harpist and composer Henriette Renie. The audience was treated to a virtuosic performance by the dashing young French harpist, Emmanuel Ceysson.

After a brief opening by the orchestra, Ceysson took command and the audience became spellbound. So rarely does one have the opportunity to hear solo

harp, and Ceysson's brilliant performance was captivating.

The first movement came to an invigorating close with fine accompaniment provided by the orchestra, despite limited rehearsal time with the soloist.

The second movement opened beautifully with solo harp, followed by a delicate reply of the strings and winds.

The energetic third movement was a display of Ceysson's crisp proficiency and the final movement, finishing with a flourish, was truly virtuosic and brought the audience immediately to its feet.

Ceysson treated the audience to an ethereal encore, "Au Matin" by Marcel Tournier, that was a brilliant conclusion to a heavenly performance.

The second half of the program began with the United States premiere of "Open Ground," a 2006 work by Russian-born composer Victoria Borisova-Ollas. "Open Ground" is a dazzling, inspired composition that was skillfully performed under Maestra Ioannides' direction and greatly appreciated by the audience who rewarded the maestra and composer Borisova-Ollas with a standing ovation.