

Violinist Rachel Barton Pine shines in program with CityMusic Cleveland

By Zachary Lewis, **The Plain Dealer**

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A talented conductor can make a concert great. Add a gifted violinist into the mix and the results can be spectacular.

Witness the combination behind Wednesday's performance by CityMusic Cleveland at Fairmount Presbyterian Church in Cleveland Heights. With Ryan McAdams on the podium and violinist Rachel Barton Pine in the soloist slot, the evening kicked off the group's ninth season in scintillating fashion.

First-rate work by McAdams notwithstanding, Pine was the night's standout playing Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1. Her impassioned, virtuoso performance held the near-capacity crowd in rapt silence and prompted enough applause to elicit an encore: a sensuous, swirling version of Albeniz's "Asturias" transcribed by Pine herself.

Perhaps the most remarkable element of Pine's performance was its articulateness. Bruch's showpiece positively sang in her account as the violinist shaped and connected its phrases with searing intelligibility.

And yet her sound never turned abrasive. Even as Pine approached states of near-rage, the tone from her 270-year-old Italian instrument remained rich and gorgeous. Where Bruch asked for tenderness, too, the violinist delivered in spades.

But the concerto is also a technical tour-de-force, and this side of the piece Pine nailed as well. In display after display of consummate skill, the violinist shot off musical pyrotechnics at soft volumes, always with perfect control and clarity.

De Falla's "Ritual Fire Dance" served as an ideal calling-card for McAdams, a rising star in the conducting firmament. Though short, the piece and his driven, strongly rhythmic performance of it managed to convey a boisterous musical personality.

A more complete portrait emerged from the conductor's performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 4. There, McAdams bolstered the impression of a fiery, detailed-oriented leader while revealing a flaw: he allowed the slow movement to sputter and drag.

Most of the symphony sizzled, however. The performance McAdams elicited was generally one of great zeal and refinement. Like Pine's account of the Bruch, his Beethoven progressed with a vigorous sense of direction.

Not all of this was the conductor's doing. Several times in his performance, McAdams stepped back and let the orchestra guide itself. It was a smart move: this is one group that clearly knows where it's going.