

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Review | A game of musical chairs and an impressive debut:
Scaglione stellar with the San Diego Symphony

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April 7, 2018, 12:45pm

There was bad news and good news for Friday evening's San Diego Symphony concert.

The bad news? Conductor Cristian Măcelaru, whose chemistry with the orchestra has created a local fan base, withdrew from the concert in order to replace Franz Welser-Möst at the Leipzig Gewandhausorchester.

The good news? It's great news, really: Young American conductor Case Scaglione made his San Diego debut, impressing with his easy rapport with the San Diego Symphony and the engaging performances he oversaw.

More good news: Cellist Andrei Ioniță announced himself as a major talent with a technically flawless and emotionally profound interpretation of Elgar's Cello Concerto.

The 24-year-old cellist has racked up awards and critical acclaim in Europe — most notably winning the 2015 Tchaikovsky Competition — but this is his first American tour. With no commercial recordings to show his skills, most in the audience had no idea of the magnitude of Ioniță's musical gifts.

In Elgar's concerto, Ioniță displayed an uncanny sureness of intonation and a beauty of tone, no matter how far his fingers traveled on the strings or how high his lines soared. His luscious sound wasn't a mechanical device, as it can be with a lesser string player whose empty technique shouts, "Listen to how beautiful this note is!" Ioniță had a wide range of timbres at his disposal, which he deployed with a probing musicality.

Scaglione was a sympathetic partner to Ioniță's interpretation, buoying the cellist's light, quick passagework and underscoring the melancholy of the slower sections of the concerto. The orchestra responded to Scaglione's conducting — and no doubt to Ioniță's playing — with precision and passion.

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