

REVIEW

Substitute conductor works out for CSO

BY MEL R. WILHOIT

CORRESPONDENT

The wonderful legend about a young Leonard Bernstein stepping in to conduct the New York Philharmonic at the last moment for its ailing conductor and becoming an overnight sensation is true.

So, it was with great anticipation that patrons of the Chattanooga Symphony & Opera eyed the podium Thursday evening at the Tivoli in anticipation of a last-minute substitution. Enter Sarah Ioannides, current music director of the El Paso Symphony and the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra, who stepped in at the last minute for the ailing Alondra de la Parra, originally scheduled as guest conductor.

Ms. Ioannides was born in Australia and studied in England, Russia and the U.S. In 2001 she received the JoAnne Falletta Award for the most promising female conductor. Her international conducting experience is most impressive. On the podium, she appears trim and striking. Conducting from memory, her gestures are clear, dramatic and controlled with no wasted motions.

Shostakovich's "Festive Overture" is one of the bet-

ter works the composer was forced to crank out for a Soviet government that placed a heavy hand on his output. In this thrilling work, Ms. Ioannides cajoled her forces toward a rousing climax, producing a fitting opener for an exciting concert.

Igor Stravinsky was the original "bad boy" of 20th-century music, and his "Firebird" — composed as music for the Russian Ballet — was his first international hit. The music is nothing less than a masterpiece. The work is highly complex and difficult to pull off, but Maestro Ioannides was the ruler of her orchestral domain, eliciting the most sensitive playing. The tight ensemble was most impressive in a work that easily could become fragmented without a sure hand at the musical helm.

Brahms' "Symphony No. 4" is a mountaintop of symphonic literature, and Ms. Ioannides directed it with sensitivity, calling forth the great passion that characterizes the work. Each line seemed to be carefully crafted, reflecting her consistently thoughtful and musical approach to an impressive debut. Definitely a serendipitous substitution.