



# Symphony Tacoma's Romeo and Juliet Collaboration = Big Win for Community

By [John Falskow](#) | October 31, 2019



Courtesy Symphony Tacoma

On October 19th, Sarah Ioannides and Symphony Tacoma performed music from Prokofiev's ballet *Romeo and Juliet*. Produced in the historical [Pantages Theater](#) of downtown Tacoma, this performance was a unique collaboration for our community—including not only the full symphony orchestra, but also actors

and students from [Tacoma's School of the Arts](#). This performance was a fantastic experience that blended drama and orchestra into a touching and profound live performance experience.

The staging for the orchestra and actors was an engaging use of space. Behind the large orchestra, a raised platform stage flanked by stairs. The front portion of the stage was lowered to the audience level. As the music was performed the characters from the play would walk in front of the orchestra, behind them, and even (on one occasion) into the orchestra. Clever use of the side box seats provided context for the famous balcony scene. This was a modern, creative staging for this music and acting—impressive and relevant work from our local arts community.

My initial concern was that the performance would be *Romeo and Juliet* as a drama with incidental music happening underneath the stage action. However, this production was all about the orchestra music, and the acting provided reference to the story the music was telling. The flow of the performance felt natural, and Prokofiev's score was always the center of attention.

That said, the School of the Arts actors were touching and sincere in bringing the characters to life. Congratulations to actors Elizabeth (Libby) Patsiga (Romeo), Annabelle Daniel (Juliet), Alexandra Vilenius (Tybalt), Westley Hackler (Mercutio), Gabriel McPherson (narrator and stage director), and Mark Thomason (technical director). The orchestral performance was gilded with their acting and narration, creating a rich context for storytelling in sound, words and actions.

The balcony scene was especially tender and touching. The young ages of the actors reflected the innocence and passion of their Shakespearean characters. The loving words of Romeo were highlighted with shimmering harmonies from the orchestra. Believable excitement, nervousness, passion and romance all delivered through Prokofiev's music, Symphony Tacoma's artistry, and words from Shakespeare.

The music was selected from the three Prokofiev *Romeo and Juliet* ballet suites. In this performance, the different ballet sections were re-ordered to fit with the plot of the play. Prokofiev's scoring is colorful, rhythmically driven, and often angular in melody and harmony. Symphony Tacoma musicians played the tricky parts with precision and flare. The brass sections played with power, resonance

and a colorful heroic sheen. The percussion played with a sensitivity that propelled the music forward. Woodwind sections (including tenor saxophone) were both nimble and poetic. And the strings balanced contrasting roles of intensity and intimacy. Under Ioannides' skilled leadership, this orchestra is playing at a very high level.

This Symphony Tacoma concert was a testament to the creativity and collaboration that our community thrives on. The audience received the performance with enthusiastic applause and admiration. The teamwork and creativity of Sarah Ioannides, School of the Arts, and the Symphony Tacoma musicians has provided a unique and profound shared experience in the performing arts.