

# The Washington Post

## Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg soars with passion of Prokofiev at Wolf Trap

By Tom Huizenga; Published: October 21



(Christian Steiner) – Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg

Violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg brought several old friends to her Friday-night concert at Wolf Trap. First, there was pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, her longtime recital partner. Others came in the form of masterworks by Sergei Prokofiev and Gabriel Fauré — music that helped launch the violinist's career when she won the Naumburg Competition in 1981.

Salerno-Sonnenberg told the audience that she recently reconnected with Prokofiev's Violin Sonata No. 1 and that she hadn't played Fauré's first sonata in 20 years. The reunion was red-blooded and passionate, resulting in a Prokofiev that unfolded like a bleak Shakespearean

tragedy and a Fauré that was smothered in affection.

Like a great actress, Salerno-Sonnenberg articulated nuances in every phrase of Prokofiev's dramatically crepuscular score. Gusts of muted scales rushed up and down the fingerboard in the opening movement, evoking "wind through a graveyard," as the composer intended. She seemed to possess an unending palette of gestures: smoky trills, snarling double stops and lightly bowed lyricism tinged with surprising vulnerability. It was a masterful performance.

Fauré's ardent, elegant and harmonically plush sonata was, by contrast, perhaps over-acted. Those who prefer a balance of fervor and French restraint might have been disappointed in Salerno-Sonnenberg's approach, which muscled through the impassioned opening allegro and over-sentimentalized the andante. The performance rolled out as grand opera, not an intimate chanson.

Salerno-Sonnenberg and McDermott, a lustrous accomplice, smartly wove in three contemporary works. Arvo Pärt's "Spiegel im Spiegel" bore out its double-mirrored construction as Salerno-Sonnenberg's whispered tones gently climbed up and down, always returning to the safety of the home pitch. The music is simple. The trick is to conjure its hypnotic power, as these players did.

Salerno-Sonnenberg soloed in "Viva" by Michael Daugherty, a two-minute frothy wink at Las Vegas. And McDermott played only the second movement, regrettably, of Charles Wuorinen's Fourth Piano Sonata. She needlessly apologized for its spikiness when it actually teemed with flashes of soft-hearted humor.

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