

Thanks for checking out our new design, please let us know if you have [feedback](#)

Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg Departs New Century Chamber Orchestra

by [Cedric](#) in [Arts & Entertainment](#) on May 20, 2017 9:55 am



Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg (center) and the New Century Chamber Orchestra, photo credit: Matthew Washburn

After nine years as artistic director, [Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg](#) is leaving the SF-based [New Century Chamber Orchestra](#). She has earned, and the ensemble has organized, a farewell [festival with three concerts](#): one of contemporary music on Tuesday night, one of workhorses with Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*, and on Saturday, a [Gershwin evening](#) featuring [Melody Moore](#) and [a party afterwards](#).

Nadja's one word reason for attending Saturday's gala: "Booze." Nadja has a large personality, which I admit, has rubbed me the wrong way. Sometimes I've found her wanting of the necessary grace I expect from classical music performers. Of course, I'm wrong, first of all, to have assumptions on how she should act; and second, to focus on aspects that are irrelevant to her performance and her sound. Her statement during a panel discussion that composer Clarice Assad would write her a five-measures-long note because "she would make magic with it" lacked humble self-awareness. But who cares as long as she does make magic with it? And most importantly, she leaves behind an impressive legacy of promoting and commissioning new works of art from American composers, and creating beautiful music. She will tell you she's proud of it, and she's right.

The evening showed both sides of Nadja: the evangelist for modern classical music, displayed in music performance spanning a wide range of styles, all of them challenging yet approachable. And the brash take-no-prisoner speaker on a panel about, well, her work, which gave us the sound bites above.

For the former, the orchestra went through a series of pieces and excerpts from "featured composers" of the NCCO, an innovation Nadja brought to the ensemble. Each year, a composer would be commissioned to write a new piece for string orchestra for the last concert of the season, while the first

presented an overview of the oeuvre of this composer.

On Tuesday, these pieces were grouped in small sets, each with its own theme. The first set (aptly, *Prologue and Variations*, by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich and *Memoria de la Luz* by Lera Auerbach) found eerie textures and the variations in the Zwilich got the orchestra to display a variety of string styles over a strong rhythmic backbone. Auerbach's featured touching solos from the viola and Nadja.

Derek Bermels' *Gliding over Algiers* recalled the Adagio of Mahler or Barber, in a very classical style over an arpeggiated bass line, so much it was disconcerting that the composer is still very alive. Jennifer Higdon's *Strings* from her Concerto for Orchestra built short, off kilter melodies over a syncopated foundation.

Mark O'Connor's *Song of the Liberty Bell* was described as ur-American (and featured in a PBS documentary about the American revolution, but it sounded rooted in the British Isles with its folksy echos off bagpipes in the long pedals of the opening. Kudos to a string orchestra to evoke bagpipes, though.

Clarice Assad's *Impressions* is a theme and variation affair, with each variation shining a spotlight on each section of the string orchestra: first the violins in a fun romp of a hoedown, then the cellos, then the bass walking and walking, a twangy fiddle-like bluegrassy bit for the 2nd violins, and a sweet lyrical adagios for the violas.

The performance included a brash *Strut* by [Michael Daugherty](#), another high energy pieces that passes the baton in between the sections and shows up their skills, and two of [Bill Bolcom](#)'s *Rags*, a throwback to early 20th century Scott Joplin music, the first one soft and mellow, the second a happy note to conclude the concert that includes the string surprisingly successfully mimicking whistles.

Contact the [author](#) of this article or email tips@sfist.com with further questions, comments or tips.

- [twitter](#)
- [facebook](#)
- [reddit](#)
- [print](#)

- [classical music](#)
-

Other Interesting Stories

Sponsored Links by Taboola

Quicken Loans Urges Homeowners To Switch To A 15 Year Fixed

Quicken Loans, NMLS#3030

The Highest Paying Cash Back Card Has Arrived (No Annual Fee)

Credit.com Credit Card Offers

The Gerber Life Grow-Up® Plan- Get A Free Quote

Gerber Life Insurance Company

Store And Share Your Ideas With Surface And Office 365

Microsoft

25 Makeup Tips All Older Women Should Know

Tipmom

We Can Guess Your Education Level With This Simple Quiz

Definition

0 Comments [SFist](#)

 [Login](#) ▾




 [Recommend](#) 1  [Share](#)

[Sort by Oldest](#) ▾



Start the discussion...

Be the first to comment.

 [Subscribe](#)  [Add Disqus to your site](#) [Add Disqus](#) [Add](#)  [Privacy](#)

Additional Stories

by [Taboola](#)

Sign Of The Times?: Mr. Marina Contestant Is Homeless: SFist

Apartment Sadness: Brosef Wants New Bro To Share Bro Pad: SFist

Ask A San Francisco Native: What's The Deal With SF Pizza?: SFist

Meet Sunday Parker, The Transportation Accessibility Advocate Tweeting Pictures Of Piss In BART Elevators: SFist

Eff-ing In SF, Vol. 8: Five Signs He's A 'Peter Pan': SFist

Couple Robbed At Gunpoint On Muni Bus: SFist

Gang Jumps And Beats Chinatown Pedestrian: SFist

Couple Attacked By Aggressive Hayes Valley Stranger: SFist

The 18 Must-Have Classic San Francisco Dishes: SFist

Men Shot To Death In The Mission, Tenderloin Thursday Night: SFist

Doughnut Dolly Abruptly Shuts Down Operations, Closing SF And Oakland Locations: SFist

Sunset Thieves Target Tents: SFist

The SFist To-Do List: 13 Cool Things To Check Out This Week: SFist

The 11 Best Destination Doughnut Spots Around The Bay Area: SFist

The 13 Most Delicious Pasta Spots In San Francisco: SFist

Additional Stories

We Can Guess Your Education Level With This Simple Quiz

Definition

Quicken Loans Urges Homeowners To Switch To A 15 Year Fixed

Quicken Loans, NMLS#3030

The Highest Paying Cash Back Card Has Arrived (No Annual Fee)

Credit.com Credit Card Offers

The Gerber Life Grow-Up® Plan- Get A Free Quote

Gerber Life Insurance Company

Store And Share Your Ideas With Surface And Office 365

Microsoft

Sponsored Links by Taboola

[best of sfist](#)

- [The 23 Best Cocktail Bars In SF](#)
- [The Best, Not-Wildly-Expensive Wine Country Restaurants](#)
- [The 9 Best Urban Hikes In SF](#)
- [The 15 Best Movie Theaters In The Bay Area](#)
- [The 13 Best Places To People Watch In SF](#)

© 2003-2017 [Gothamist LLC](#). All rights reserved. [Terms of Use & Privacy Policy](#).