

Review: Violin Virtuoso Dazzles as Soloist in "Autumn Sunshine - Winter Dreams" *By Lisa Helferman*

Ann Fontanella did not disappoint when she returned to Johnstown to perform in the "Autumn Sunshine - Winter Dreams" concert at the Pasquerilla Performing Arts Center last month. The 22-year-old violin virtuoso, who boldly took the stage in a strapless, jewel-adorned crimson dress, looked like a Renaissance painting come to life as she began the first movement of Saint-Saens' Violin Concerto No. 3 in B Minor, backed by the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra.

The last protégé of the "Old Russian School" style of violin was in rare form as she engaged in a musical dialogue with the orchestra, led by internationally acclaimed conductor, Istvan Jaray. Fontanella's expressive eyebrows enhanced her passionate performance of the melancholic 'Allegro non troppo,' while her smooth bow strokes took center stage in the more romantic second movement, 'Andantino quasi allegretto,' which she describes as a "pleasant gondola ride." But it was the third, and final, movement in which the acclaimed violinist, often compared to Jascha Heifetz, seemed most in her element. Ms. Fontanella played gypsy-style, joined the woodwinds in responding to the soft strings, and was able to display her wild bow work in the lively, brass-infused finish, making her 320-year-old Brancino violin sing. With such precision, intensity, and ability to hit every note regardless of speed, one can see why the virtuoso performer is repeatedly brought back by popular demand. Maestro Jaray and the symphony opened the concert with moving renditions of Bach's "Air," and Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings, and ended the night with Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 1 "Winter Dreams."