

State symphony gives whirlwind performance

By David Williams

FOR THE GAZETTE

The West Virginia Symphony stopped in Hurricane Saturday night for a concert on its annual spring tour. A freezing rain suggested that spring was still being held at bay, but that didn't keep a large crowd from filling Forrest Burdette Memorial United Methodist Church for the concert.

Pianist Alan Gampel joined the orchestra for an exciting performance of Maurice Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major. Ravel's take on the concerto form is about as opposite from 19th century tradition as one could get. The pianist is less a protagonist of the orchestra as he is an elaborator. In the fast movements, Ravel's music often has the pianist firing off ornamented versions of everything the orchestra is already playing.

Gampel displayed technical brilliance from the outset, contrasting moments of delicacy with hammering ferocity. He had an exceptionally powerful low range, devoid of murk.

The slow central movement had a wistful beauty. Gampel played a gorgeous flowing melody in his right hand. His left handed played out the music's quirky mystery — a waltz beat twice as fast as the rest of the music. Conductor Thomas Conlin's accompaniment, with an extended solo for English horn, had

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an understated elegance.

The finale had fleet energy. Gampel snapped out the wild extremes of his part while the solo trumpet, horn and winds — including some astonishing theatrics for the bassoons — provided a polished counterpoint.

The pianist played a jaw-dropping encore, a transcription of the "Infernal Dance" from Stravinsky's ballet "The Firebird."