

# Strings 'zing' while alphorn resonates

By Sandra Matuschka

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**NEWPORT** — One instrument dominated the stage — literally — at Newport Music Festival's "Festa Italiana: Zings with the Strings" on Thursday — and it wasn't a string.

A selection by Antonio Piovano — "Concertino Campestre" — listed for alphorn and strings, did not prepare the audience for the appearance of the alphorn. A collective gasp and chuckle accompanied the instrument's entrance, which required assistance. A little more than 13 feet long, the wooden horn began as a mouthpiece, then widened and crossed the stage, culminating in a large-mouthed, upraised curvature that rested on the floor.

What sound, the audience wondered, would this odd horn make? As it turned out, a wonderful mellow sound — most of the time. The yeoman's work of creating notes on this horn, using only mouth and tongue (there are no keys) ably fell to **Carlo Torlontano**, who is internationally known for his work with this unusual instrument that is known for sending signals throughout the Alpine valleys. This contemporary musical work was a World Premiere dedicated to Festival General Director Mark P. Malkovich III. The composer had created an earlier work that Malkovich really liked. "The work was so successful that he had the idea of writing a second one," Malkovich said. The composer's son, Luigi Piovano, played the cello in the "Concertino" piece.

The three-part concertino moved through a sweet, tranquil and mellow mid-section into a lively part that had the alphorn participating musically rather like a peppy giraffe. Pizzicato violins surrounded the alphorn as it moved into its place of honor with deep, vibrant tones. The third section, a danza, was sprightly with the violins singing and performing pizzicato while the alphorn musically clumped around the notes in a delightful, melodic and almost toe-tapping piece.



Then the alphorn went into a strange and wonderful double-noted sound — a melody with its own accompaniment — reminiscent of the harmonic singing done by the Gyoto Monks of Tibet in which they sing several notes at once by changing mouth shape and creating resonating spaces in their mouth and sinuses, making high, whistling tones in addition to lower, fundamental ones. Considering that the notes had to move through 13 feet of horn and surround an audience, the result was awesome.

Soprano Wendy Waller held the audience in thrall with her full-throated and clear rich tones commanding the selections she performed — Baldassare Galuppi's "Regina Coeli" and Gaetano

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