

# Somewhere ‘Over the Rainbow’

Spokane Symphony concertmaster composes violin solo for astronaut Anne McClain as she launches ...



Spokane Symphony's concertmaster Mateusz Wolski photographed in 2022. COLIN MULVANY/ THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

BY JAMES HANLON THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Spokane astronaut Anne Mc- Clain has a theme song to listen to as she returns to space.

When Spokane Symphony's lead violinist and concertmaster Mateusz Wolski heard

that McClain was part of NASA's Crew-10 mission to the International Space Station, he was inspired to compose a song for the moment.

"I just felt compelled to create something nice for her and knowing how much the Spokanites here appreciate her," said Wolski, the symphony concertmaster. "It just came over me."

He recently watched the film "Wicked," so he was thinking about "The Wizard of Oz." Stuck in his head was the theme "Over the Rainbow" – a song about hopes, dreams and, in a way, coming home. He adapted the melody into an original composition evoking the cosmos.

After a few hours of practice last weekend, he recorded it on his iPhone from his music stand and texted it to McClain, wishing her the best on her travel. He didn't expect it to be publicized, but McClain loved it so much she shared it. She also sent it to herself so she can listen to it aboard the ISS, he said.

"It feels completely surreal from my perspective," Wolski said. "All I was trying to do was – a person like her with all the stress happening in the world could use something uplifting and beautiful."

Wolski plans to record a higher-quality version after NASA asked to share it. He also plans to perform it as an encore at the symphony's Masterworks concerts March 29–30 at Martin Woldson Theater at The Fox.

Wolski met McClain a little more than five years ago when she was a special guest for the symphony at a concert celebrating the 50th anniversary of the moon landing. Wolski asked her lots of questions about space travel, and the two kept in touch.

The short tribute is about 21/2 minutes long, but it's much more than a simple cover.

"When you hear the theme, you know what the song is, but the way I set it up to create a mood, you don't know what will happen next," Wolski said.

To capture the sense of large distance in space travel, Wolski uses a combination of very high and very low registers on the violin, oscillating back and forth. It's a difficult maneuver, Wolski said, but it has the effect of sounding like two violins playing at the same time.

Ultimately, the piece is a fusion of Wolski's lifelong fascination with art and science.

“It's a natural bridge between exploration of what is out there and at the same time looking inward and being connected.”

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