



Dr. Kira Omelchenko (center) will lead the Florida Southern Symphony Orchestra, seen here, in a concert on April 23 in Branscomb Auditorium.

Kira Omelchenko: A Calling to Conduct

By Cary McMullen and Salma Nawlo | Florida Southern College

For those who think a conductor's job is little more than waving a baton, Dr. Kira Omelchenko lets you in on "the hidden part of the job description."

"I see it in multiple layers, like an onion. I'm here to serve the college and be a good teacher, to be a good role model for my students, to keep up with my scholarship, and to show I can be a musician and a responsible citizen, doing outreach and service," she said.

There is a lot of enthusiasm compressed like a spring into Omelchenko's petite frame. She assumed the post of assistant professor of music at Florida Southern College in August with the duties of directing the orchestra and strings programs. Already she has wowed her students and faculty colleagues with her musicianship.

Omelchenko started playing the violin when she was 10. She got her first opportunity to conduct in high school when her orchestra conductor encouraged her to give it a try. As a college student, she pursued a double degree in violin performance and theater, and then focused on conducting in her graduate studies.

"It felt like a calling. It felt more natural. I have a background in dance, and using my body felt like a natural way to express the music," she said.

Natural indeed. In October, Omelchenko won third place in the opera division of The American Prize in Conducting, a national award in the performing arts. Her winning entry was a video of her conducting *La Traviata* during a guest engagement with the Bulgarian State Opera.

"It was a rigorous, six-month process," reflected Omelchenko. "There were 30 final candidates chosen. I feel very lucky and grateful to have been one of the winners."

"When we hired Dr. Omelchenko," said Dr. Brad Hollingshead, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at FSC, "we knew that she brought the right combination of academic and professional experience to contribute immediately to our music program. Students have responded well to her skill as a teacher and conductor, and her most recent award simply underscores what we knew from the beginning."

Omelchenko also has contributed to the recorded repertoire. As part of her doctoral dissertation at the University of Iowa, she prepared the first critical performing edition of the overture to early American composer George F. Bristow's opera *Rip Van Winkle*. This year, the Royal Northern Sinfonia in the United Kingdom will release its recording of Omelchenko's edition of the overture on the New World label.

Although she has an affinity for Beethoven, Omelchenko said it's important to pay attention to new music as well and the FSC orchestra's spring concert on April 23 will include the premiere of a work by her husband, composer and teacher Stas Omelchenko. Also on the program are works by Debussy, Dvorak and Holst.

"My passions are music and people," said Kira Omelchenko. "When you have 100 people in one room, to create that relationship with one another and the music is something special."

