

Summerfest Celebrates 25 Years With Musically Enticing Program And Superb Performances

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FORT LAUDERDALE, FL -- The Symphony of the Americas celebrated its 25th annual Summerfest with a wonderfully varied program on Sunday afternoon (July 17) at the Broward Center. A special festival orchestra was formed for the occasion and the concert tour of Florida and Panama. In addition to members of the Symphony of the Americas, the ensemble included musicians from the Zurich Chamber Orchestra, Mission Chamber Orchestra, Hungarian Opera Orchestra and Arpeggione Chamber Orchestra plus a guest artist from the Republic of Georgia, currently working in Switzerland - truly an international amalgamation. Maestro James Brooks-Bruzzese provided energetic podium leadership.

The festive program was refreshingly adventurous, spotlighting some rarely heard works of consistently high quality. Even the scores of Mozart and Vivaldi that were played came from those masters' less frequently performed output. The first terse chords of Ernest Bloch's neo-Baroque Concerto-Grosso No.1 immediately displayed the ensemble's precision. Playing the important keyboard part (Bloch's 20th century version of the Baroque concertante group), Renée LaBonte provided the continuo undercurrent with emphatic articulation.

Tartini's Sonata in G minor (The Devil's Trill) is a familiar violin work but Marilyn Maingart's flute transcription was something different indeed. Maingart, principal flute of the Symphony of the Americas, played with silvery tone and a flowing sense of line. Her triple tonguing was quite dazzling. A florid original cadenza vividly encapsulated the instrument's resources and dexterity. Maingart's adaptation and performance met Tartini's virtuosic creation on its own terms.

The work of Georgian composer Otar Taktakishvili is largely unfamiliar to American audiences. Specially commissioned for Summerfest 2016, Georgian born violinist Sandro Tigishvili's transcription for violin and strings of Taktakishvili's Concertino (received its world premiere. Taktakishvili was a pupil of Dmitri Shostakovich and he wrote his Concertino for legendary Russian violin master David Oistrakh, dedicatee of violin works by Prokofiev and Shostakovich among others. The Taktakishvili score is truly beautiful, an utter delight from first bar to last. Cast in three movements, the concertino opens with a graceful melody tinged with bitters. The second movement is a neo-classical serenata while the finale resembles a scherzo-caprice, affording the soloist a display of violin pyrotechnics. Tigishvili is a violinist of formidable technique and musicality. His silken tone, elegant phrasing and rapid fire bravura (in the concluding movement) superbly demonstrated musicianship of the highest order and the string ensemble matched him in brilliance and warmth and richness of sonority.

Lorenzo Turchi-Floris' *Aspettando Anninnora* was another Summerfest premiere and commission. The score is an ingeniously crafted set of theme and variations. Unlike in most such pieces, the theme - a gentle lullaby - does not appear until the end, although it is suggested (in various guises) throughout the work. There is an aura of appropriate mystery about the opening piano lines and string pizzicatos. The following variations range from fast and astringent to soft and lyrical. A charming waltz recalls Prokofiev's ballet scores. A fine set of fine miniatures, Turchi-Floris' work is both lovely and musically inventive. The composer was the outstanding piano soloist, playing with alternate dulcet subtlety and keyboard spanning brilliance. Brooks-Bruzzese led a finely balanced, rhythmically supple performance, a fulcrum of support for all of the afternoon's soloists.

The program's second half began with a brisk, crisp ride through Mozart's Divertimento in B-flat Major, K. 137. Brooks-Bruzzese captured the courtly elegance of the final Allegro assai and drew incisive, disciplined playing from the ensemble. Symphony of the Americas members Svetlana and Orlando Forte soloed in Vivaldi's *L'Estro Armonico*, Op. 3 (Concerto for 2 Violins in A minor). Their agile interplay of musical roles was particularly distinguished in the second movement. One off Vivaldi's darker slow movements, the *Largo e spiritoso* presents a serene melody played by the two violin soloists over grave ensemble chords. The Fortes' blending of timbres was so smoothly achieved that, at times, they sounded as one. A high energy reading of the final Allegro was seasoned with just the right brusque touch.

Karl Jenkins' *Palladio* is based on a melody the composer wrote for a De Berris diamond commercial. Recasting the music as a Baroque concerto-grosso, Jenkins has composed a high octane vignette. The string players brought surging energy to their catchy cameo and Orlando Forte's silky tone took the spotlight in a featured violin solo. Astor Piazzolla's *Libertango* is one of the most popular works of the "nuevo tango" oeuvre. From the first rumbles of LaBonte's piano, the music was given a whirlwind, hard driving perusal.

The scheduled program concluded with two movements from the *Serenade No. 2 in C* by Robert Fuchs. An Austrian contemporary of Johannes Brahms, Fuchs' music is replete with inspired melodies, charming Viennese rhythms and suggestions of Hungarian folk melody and dance. Fuchs' string writing is luxuriant and the tonal glow of the festival ensemble did full justice to this wonderful score.

Cheers and a standing ovation brought a delectable encore - *El Manisero* (known widely in an English version as *The Peanut Vendor*) by Cuban composer Moisés Simons, played with deft rhythmic acuity - a bright conclusion to a picture perfect afternoon of music.

The Summerfest ensemble tours Panama July 24-August 1, presenting performances, master classes and educational presentations. Additional performances in Vero Beach, Miami Lakes, Pembroke Pines and Boca Raton (August 7 at the FAU Theater) follow the Panama residency. See www.sota.org for details.