

Orchestras galore

Symphonic music is strong in Buenos Aires, whether big, medium or small, foreign and local

BY PABLO BARDIN
FOR THE HERALD

If you like symphonic music, you certainly get a lot to like in our city, even if for financial reasons the very top is currently impossible to import.

Pride of place goes to an admirable chamber orchestra, the Kammerakademie Potsdam (début) conducted by Trevor Pinnock, and with the great flautist Emmanuel Pahud. They came for the Mozarteum at the Colón. Pinnock's fame is based on The English Concert, a historicist group which he founded in 1972 and led during three decades; when he visited us a long time ago, it was a Baroque revelation.

Now he showed that Classicism can be served ideally with modern instruments in a wonderful programme of Haydn, Mozart and Devienne. The Potsdamers are 23, with more women than men; strings, oboes, bassoon and horns. The size proved enough for the chosen repertoire (it wouldn't be for Mozart's *Jupiter*). The evening was exquisite with the accent put on stylish phrasing; they do more than playing very well, they are united by the conductor's unerring sense of how the music should go. And the choice of symphonies was perfect: Haydn's *No. 47, The palindrome*, is full of surprises, as befits one of the so-called "Sturm und Drang" group (44 to 49), in which Haydn took audacious steps into the future. Why palindromic? Because in the Minuet and Trio the musical idea is retrograded note by note. And Mozart's *No. 29, K.208*, is a radiant example of his genius when he was just 18 years old.

Pahud has been here before and is considered a great star; he has been first desk of the Berlin Philharmonic since 1992. He chose Mozart's *Second Concerto, K.314*, a transposition of his *Oboe Concerto K.271*, and François Devienne's *Concerto No. 7*. Mozart's sounds well in both versions; Pahud wasn't quite at his best in the first movement, but from the second on, it was blissful to hear him, and that also applies to the Devienne (1759-1803), who on the evidence of this Concerto should be better known: written rather amazingly in E minor, the score had drama as well as light and was as good a presentation card of his talent as imaginable. The encore at the very end (after the Mozart symphony) was delectable: the Dance of the Blessed Spirits from Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice*.

PICKED UP

Deceptively called Orchestra Teatro Regio Torino, an important opera house, what came here was a 22-strong ensemble: 11 violins, four violas, three cellos, two basses, harp and harpsichord. Mem-

bers, yes, of that orchestra, but it was far from full symphonic form. Both five string players and the soloist/conductor for this tour Sergey Galaktionov played historic instruments.

The occasion was the third concert of Nuova Harmonia, at the Coliseo. All the artists made their local début. The hand programme had nary a word about Sergey Galaktionov, who on this showing is an impressive soloist and conductor.

Unfortunately half the programme was a total loss, for I find Max Richter's 2012 re-composition of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* (the most recorded of all Baroque works and truly a masterpiece) an irritating and inane bad job, marked, for example, by the absurd ending in the middle of a phrase of many movements and by leaving out many crucial parts. This was an unwelcome première, even if it was played by accomplished artists.

However, things picked up enormously in the Second Part: the String Sextet called by Tchaikovsky "*Souvenir de Florence*" functions very well by adding bass parts and more players, for the music is inventive and heart-warming, and in this passionate performance Galaktionov showed his mettle as conductor and got the best out of his players. Nice encores with Galaktionov himself as violin soloist: Shostakovich's *Romanza* and Piazzolla's *Oblivion*.

TALENTED TEAMS

The Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra is another one of those talented university teams that abound in the United States. Conducted by Federico Cortese, it curiously had no less than 20 players out of the total 76 from the Orquesta de Aeropuertos Argentina 2000, new to me; and it included three saxophones needed for the initial score, Gershwin's *An American in Paris*.

Question mark: was the addition of Argentines a camaraderie feature, or a way to spend less?

On the other hand, the blend of Harvard and Radcliffe meant that a considerable number of women played; I won't venture the exact quantity because many have Oriental names that are a mystery to me. According to the information on the hand programme the HRO numbers 100 players, so the 20 locals seem to be reinforcements and, yes, a way to spend less. The venue was the Blue Whale.

Gershwin was done with appropriate swing but some flaws, and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 4* was quite good, with alert rhythm and adequate shaping of lines; however, the high point surely was Liszt's *First Piano Concerto*, for George Li showed not only stunning accuracy but also a sensitive approach to the virtuoso score. His beautiful timbre was also heard in the en-

core, Chopin's *Nocturne No. 21* (I believe). And the orchestra after Beethoven played their encore, a rousing version of Ginastera's overplayed *Malambo* from *Estancia*. All made their début.

IN FINE SHAPE

And now to our Buenos Aires Philharmonic. Japanese conductor Eiji Oue came for the third time, after making a good impression on former visits (2001, 2010). He has held posts at Osaka, Hannover, Barcelona and Minnesota (ex-Minneapolis). This time he displayed a showman's gesticulation which I didn't relish in a forgettable première, a 14-minute Suite from Bernstein's *Candide* by Charles Harmon. It was bombastic and unsatisfying, leaving out many of the best tunes; I'll stick to the exhilarating and often played *Overture* such as Bernstein left it.

But the conductor demonstrated his capability in Penderecki's difficult *Flute Concerto* written for Rampal in 1993 in one continuous movement (22 minutes) of big contrasts between harshness and lyricism; it was admirably played by Claudio Barile. And Oue gave us finally a first-rate reading of Brahms' mighty *First Symphony*, carefully built and graded with intelligence to its true climactic points.

Enrique Arturo Diemecke came back for the following two concerts, again contrasting his authentic musical acumen with silly, obnoxious and unnecessary comments. The enormous *Manfred* programmatic symphony by Tchaikovsky was intense and dramatic, though arguably with too prolonged silences at various points, with the Phil in fine shape. But the surprise was in the first part: not only a very agreeable première, the unabashedly *Romantic Horn Concerto* written in 1950 by Reinhold Glière, but with the fantastic playing of Radek Baborak, first desk of the Berlin Philharmonic from 2002 and 2011 and probably the greatest player of this notoriously treacherous but beautiful instrument. His encore was quite a gesture: with four hornists of the Phil a special arrangement of Piazzolla's *Adiós Nonino*.

Finally, a homage to Rachmaninov: the *Second Piano Concerto* and the sprawling but meaty *Second Symphony*. Evgueni Mikhailov, a Russian, had visited us years ago when he played a recital and Schumann's *Concerto*; his powerful technique coped with all obstacles in Rachmaninov's melodic but demanding music and he was unfazed by a very poor accompaniment in the first movement (probably too little rehearsal); from the slow movement on matters ameliorated in the orchestra.

The conductor gave us a valuable reading of the very complex symphony and the Phil responded in kind.



Pianist Eugeni Mikhailov performs with the Buenos Aires Philharmonic, led by Enrique Arturo Diemecke.



French horn player Radek Baborak performs with the Buenos Aires Philharmonic, led by Enrique Arturo Diemecke.



Flautist Claudio Barile performs with the Buenos Aires Philharmonic, led by Japanese conductor Eiji Oue.

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