

MUSIC REVIEW

Cross-border effort bridges art, music

The Long Beach Symphony and an ensemble from Mexico share a musical vision of museum paintings.

By Richard S. Ginell
Special to The Times

May 23, 2005

Almost everyone in classical music these days makes well-meaning noises about reaching out to the Latino community, but the Long Beach Symphony actually did something significant about it. Saturday night at the Terrace Theatre, the orchestra and its music director, Enrique Arturo Diemecke, gave the U.S. premiere of an arresting multimedia piece called "Dos Visiones."

Two visions indeed, for everywhere you looked, there were pairs. Two orchestras in two countries — the LBSO and the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de México — co-commissioned the piece, along with two nonperforming groups, Long Beach's Museum of Latin American Art and the American Composers Forum. Two composers, Mexico City's Ana Lara and New Jersey's Robert Maggio, were selected to write three movements each, arranged in pairs with one composer following the next.

Basically, the agenda for Lara and Maggio was to write music inspired by paintings from the museum, while another pair of collaborators, film engineer/cinematographer Vito Kobilha and video choreographer Jack Fishman, concocted a video collage of the artwork. Sound familiar? "Pictures at an Exhibition" immediately comes to mind, but unlike Mussorgsky, neither Lara nor Maggio explicitly illustrate the paintings in their music.

In the first two movements, there were seemingly two divergent personalities at work — Lara's Mexican street procession over a pounding pace with traces of mariachi, followed by Maggio's juxtaposition of unusual effects (percussion shakers, faint women's voices, strummed piano strings) with snatches of American hymns woven into cinematic cues.

Yet in the next pair of movements, both unveiled bizarre senses of humor, with the antic, barbed spirit of Silvestre Revueltas hovering mischievously overhead. In the final pair, one got the feeling that both composers were seeking common ground and the video choreography grew more ambitious, with cubes of revolving artwork and finally a "Star Wars"-like race through an art-decorated tunnel. The 41-minute suite came off best when the composers forgot about the pretensions of ground-breaking and just had a fine time sending up everything.

"Pictures at an Exhibition" would have been an obvious companion piece. Too obvious, perhaps, so Diemecke opted for Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" Symphony where he exploited the outer movements for all the pulled-about, overwrought emotion he could muster.

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