

Sunday, October 29, 2017



Yo-Yo Ma performed Strauss's "Don Quixote" with Michael Tilson Thomas and the New World Symphony Saturday night at the Arsht Center. Photo: Slggi Bachmann

Yo-Yo Ma returns as Strauss's knight errant with MTT, New World Symphony

By David Fleshler

Miami has experienced enough hurricanes that a mere tropical storm wasn't going to keep many people from a performance by the star cellist Yo-Yo Ma.

They came to the Arsht Center expecting to be blown away by Ma's playing, not by Tropical Storm Philippe, and the cellist's performance of Strauss's *Don Quixote* with the New World Symphony generated one of the longest ovations in recent memory.

Organized as a theme and variations, the work depicts the delusional old Spanish nobleman of the Cervantes novel, who attempts to become a knightly hero in an era of faded chivalric ideals. Although it's sometimes called a de facto cello concerto, Strauss' work really doesn't feel like one in tone or structure. It's a programmatic, often highly literal work, as one of music's master orchestrators generates effects that depict bleating sheep, howling wind and the disintegration of the old man's mind under the intoxicating influence of knightly tales.

Ma gave a theatrical performance that made the cello an actor in the drama. He hammed it up with exaggerated slides down the strings to emphasize the slapstick humor of the Don's pratfalls. He brought the bow down in a pointedly aggressive manner as the would-be knight charged windmills and flocks of sheep. At the end, as the Don's sanity returns, he played the last melody in the faded, elegiac manner of man contemplating his end.

Less apparent in this performance was the knightly side of the Don's character, a real part of the work. There were times that a big, golden cello sound seemed called for, and Ma delivered a thin, reedy tone that sounded more like the delusional old man that Don Quixote was, rather than the knight he aspired to be. And there were times when he played so softly that he could barely be heard over the orchestra. In the first variation, for example, the cello plays a bumptious passage in triplets that gradually becomes lyrical and impassioned, as the orchestra joins in with a soaring theme in violins, but the cello's essential contribution was almost inaudible.

The work has a big viola part as well, depicting the Don's sidekick, Sancho Panza. Jonathan Vinocour, principal viola of the San Francisco Symphony, gave the part a sturdy, earthy performance.

Under music director Michael Tilson Thomas, the orchestra delivered a colorful, virtuoso account of a work that makes major demands on the orchestra. The swirling themes of the introduction effectively depicted the Don's developing madness. Muted brass crackled with a sound so characteristic of Strauss's music. Oboes persuasively portrayed his lady Dulcinea and peasant girls. And brass memorably depicted the bleating sheep that the Don mistakes for an approaching army.

The concert opened with Schubert's *Rosamunde* Overture, led by conducting fellow Dean Whiteside.

After a solemn introduction, played with great sonority, the orchestra launched into the jaunty themes that have kept alive this incidental music to a forgotten Viennese play. Strings played with a precision that was never fussy, bringing out the exuberance of the main theme. Soft, rustling passages bubbled with energy and retained their clarity in passages that could become murky in the hands of lesser performers.

Tilson Thomas led a restrained, transparent performance of Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 4, known as the "Italian" symphony.

The opening theme, often played with blaring extroversion, came off as graceful and high-spirited. The movement was played with a transparency that allowed all voices to be heard, even in intricate fugal passages, but without a trace of chaos. The celebratory feeling of Mendelssohn in this mood came through, without the brassy tone that attends some interpretations.

After displaying similar restraint in the inner movements, Tilson Thomas opened up the orchestra for the whirling dances of the last movement. The saltarello and tarantella melodies raced from section to section, never losing momentum or clarity, bringing the work to a lively close.

Online:

<http://southfloridaclassicalreview.com/2017/10/yo-yo-ma-returns-as-s Strauss-knight-errant-with-mtt-new-world-symphony/>

South Florida CLASSICAL REVIEW

Sunday, November 12, 2017



Mark Wigglesworth conducted the New World Symphony in music of Elgar and Britten Saturday night.

Wigglesworth leads New World in rewarding 20th century program

By Lawrence Budmen

Three works from the first half of the 20th Century made up a challenging and difficult program for the New World Symphony and guest conductor Mark Wigglesworth on Saturday night at the New World Center in Miami Beach. An early vocal work by Benjamin Britten and a mature masterpiece by Elgar shared space with quasi-neoclassical Stravinsky, and the New World played all three wonderfully, taking its cues

from an idiomatically attuned conductor to demonstrate that this ensemble can hold its own with the best.

Britten began writing *Les Illuminations* in England and completed the score in New York in 1939. The song cycle marks the beginning of the composer's highly productive wartime sojourn in America. Set to stanzas of the nineteenth century poet Arthur Rimbaud, the work effectively captures the ecstatic spirit of the texts, which presage surrealism. The score veers from entrancing waltzes to French-tinged chansons and spare declamation. The mastery of vocal writing that would characterize the Britten operas to come is strongly evident in this entrancing creation. Originally conceived for solo soprano and string orchestra, Britten adapted the work for tenor Peter Pears, his life partner and muse, and the score is usually performed accordingly.

Scottish tenor Nicky Spence was a superb protagonist on Saturday. With a large, powerful instrument and vocal range that encompassed a low baritone register and strength at the top, Spence ably painted the score's shifting patterns. Singing in French with projected supertitles, he immediately commanded attention with his agile declamation of "I alone hold the key to this savage parade," the leitmotiv of the 20-minute score. He soared in the beguiling melody of "Antique" and softly

caressed the dream spun cantabile line of "Being Beauteous." Spence conjured up the band of motley and exotic marchers in "Parade" and brought tenderness to the final reverie of "Départ."

Guided by Wigglesworth, the New World strings exhibited vigorous, razor-sharp articulation in the initial "Fanfare." The silky tonal compass of the violins formed a constant accompanying undercurrent, and Wigglesworth masterfully conveyed the cellos' and double basses' final fade to silence.

The German conductor Hans Richter called Sir Edward Elgar's Symphony No. 1 in A-flat Major "the greatest symphony of modern times, written by the greatest modern composer." Hyperbole aside, it was hard to disagree with Richter's assessment judging by the fervor and meticulous attention to detail that Wigglesworth brought to the performance. This large-scale 50-minute work, premiered by Richter in 1908, finds the mature Elgar at the height of his powers. Wigglesworth conveyed the symphony's long-spun arc in a reading that alternated tension, repose and boundless momentum in perfect proportion. The angst-ridden nostalgia of the third movement Adagio forms the symphony's heart. Here Wigglesworth drew impassioned expressiveness and richness of tone from the fine string section, with solo interjections by horn and bassoon astutely balanced. He built the gradual crescendo to a glowing climax.

Wigglesworth paced the opening "nobilmente" theme of the first movement with stately reserve, but brought real intensity to the restless, churning Allegro section. Extreme

contrasts of loud and soft dynamism were vividly pointed, and the big climaxes were given full sway. Despite the work's thick scoring (which included five horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba), the recurrent glissando lines of the two harps were projected with clarity.

In the second movement Allegro molto, the four-member percussion section's whip-crack articulation and the strings' rapid leaps generated excitement. An animated rendition of the storm-tossed finale was capped by the triumphant return of the initial "nobilmente" melody, bathed in brass tones both mellow and vibrant. Wigglesworth drew superb playing from all sections of the large ensemble. The symphony, one of Elgar's finest creations, seems to encompass a bygone world; Wigglesworth and the orchestra memorably conveyed its beauty and majesty.

The concert opened with Igor Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (1920), the program's outlier. Mixing astringent thematic threads with austere brass chorales based on Russian orthodox chants, the nine-minute score bristles with urbane modernity far removed from the colorful orchestral panoply of Stravinsky's early ballets. The 23-member wind ensemble exhibited incisive attack and finely shaded contrasts. New World conducting fellow Dean Whiteside led a relaxed traversal that captured the work's acerbic outbursts and contrasting lyrical threads.

Online:

<http://southfloridaclassicalreview.com/2017/11/wigglesworth-leads-new-world-in-rewarding-20th-century-program/>

South Florida CLASSICAL REVIEW

Sunday, December 10, 2017



Jeffrey Milarsky conducted the New World Symphony's "Sounds of the Times" program Saturday night.

Contrasted Lindberg and Mackey works make for bracing New World program

By Lawrence Budmen

When contemporary music specialist Jeffrey Milarsky takes the podium at the New World Symphony's Sounds of the Times series, significant new music is always on the agenda.

Previous Milarsky visits have yielded John Luther Adams' Pulitzer Prize-winning [Become Ocean](#) and Michael Gordon's luminous multimedia extravaganza [Gotham](#) among other worthy works. Milarsky returned to New World Center on Saturday night

with two very different scores by Finland's Magnus Lindberg and the American Steven Mackey.

Lindberg belongs to the high modernist school of European composers. Unlike many avant gardists, however, his scores flow with wit, intellect and creative imagination that hold the attention. Such renowned conductors as Simon Rattle, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Alan Gilbert are among Lindberg's leading advocates.

His chamber orchestral work *Joy* is the third part of a larger triptych written between 1988 and 1990. The thirty-minute score is a trip through spectral effects and fiercely contrasted timbres that constantly entrance the ear.

Short motivic invention abounds in this busy score in which many events overlap through Lindberg's layered writing. The piano is treated almost as a solo instrument. Right from the start, piano fragments are set against a mallet percussive onslaught. Chimes, marimba and xylophone often mix with brasses to create a very bright sound. There are brief taped interludes, surprisingly quiet, of the destruction of a grand piano. Despite the scoring for just twenty-three players, the climaxes are massive in volume and force. Skittering string

lines at times seem totally unrelated to the surrounding wind and brass chords. Lindberg's instrumental writing tests the players' skill to the maximum, none more so than the galloping figures for clarinets than span the instruments' entire range. The work's ending is sudden and unexpectedly quiet. Lindberg manages to make all of the divergent elements work and constantly hold the listener's attention.

Milarsky is a master of highly complex modern scores. He expertly kept the ensemble on top of the constant changes of meter and achieved pinpoint dynamic contrasts. Special kudos to Dean Zhang who handled the gnarly keyboard writing brilliantly, doubling on celesta as well as piano. The ensemble played this difficult work with a mixture of enthusiasm, total instrumental command and idiomatic flair.

Mackey's *Mnemosyne's Pool* was a joint commission of the New World Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, the National Symphony Orchestra (Washington, DC) and Australia's Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Saturday's performance marked the work's East Coast premiere.

The title refers to the goddess of memory and myth in Greek mythology. In pre-performance remarks, Mackey described the 38-minute, five-movement work as "somewhere between a symphony and a concerto for orchestra." The work is scored for full orchestra and exploits the colors of the instrumental choirs to the utmost.

Mackey is a former rock guitarist and his early orchestral works in the 1990's uneasily attempted to fuse his pop music background with classical genres. (Michael Tilson Thomas and the New World Symphony recorded an album of those scores.)

Mnemosyne's Pool is considerably more sophisticated. While Mackey sometimes lays on the barrages of brass volleys with too heavy a hand, the score is immensely likable. The ghost of Copland hovers somewhere in the background but not in a derivative manner.

The initial "Variations" immediately grips the attention with a soundscape of brass and chimes. Episodes for plucked violins and chirpy winds morph into full orchestral thematic strands. Mackey throws out a grab bag of melodic material in the second movement "Déjà vu." A folksy subject for two clarinets is particularly catchy. "Fleeting" serves as a bubbly scherzo with the entire orchestra in full flashy regalia – sort of a 21st century Roman Carnival Overture.

The fourth movement "In Memoriam A.H.S." follows without pause. Hard percussion clashes introduce two cellos playing a grave, elegiac melody. This beautiful moment is all the more remarkable in the midst of the orchestral pyrotechnics that have preceded it. Eventually the theme becomes a weighted brass chorale.

The finale "Echoes" begins in a sentimental fashion but quickly turns pointed and quirky. A long, rapid section for violins is balletic and

vigorous in the mode of Appalachian Spring which the New World played just last week. The coda brings a sonic wallop only to end with soft string chords.

The prominent harp part was expertly handled by Chloe Tula. She adeptly blended the instrument's timbres with Mackey's brass and mallet combinations. Milarsky led an often eloquent reading with the full orchestra in top form. Mackey was awarded repeated curtain calls by the enthusiastic audience.

Online:

<http://southfloridaclassicalreview.com/2017/12/contrasted-works-by-lindberg-and-mackey-make-for-a-bracing-new-world-program/>

South Florida CLASSICAL REVIEW

Sunday, January 14, 2018



Yefim Bronfman performed Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 with Robert Spano and the New World Symphony Saturday night at the Arsht Center. Photo; Dario Acosta

Bronfman, Spano team up with New World Symphony for electrifying night at the Arsht Center

By Inesa Gegprifti

Saturday evening brought a display of world-class performances at the Knight Concert Hall of the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts by pianist Yefim Bronfman and the New World Symphony conducted by Robert Spano.

The first orchestral notes of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor outline the motif that is to persist throughout the first movement. Under Spano's direction

the musicians executed the lengthy introduction with absolute precision of articulation and consistent phrasing, highlighting elegantly the timbre contrasts between strings and woodwinds.

Bronfman's entrance was commanding, yet not overpowering. His approach lent itself to an overarching thoughtful interpretation; one that did not needlessly dwell on every harmonic change, but expressed the varying characters with a purity of tone and simplicity of expression. The development section of the Allegro con brio showcased Bronfman's outstanding chamber musicianship as he gracefully floated the conversational exchanges between the piano and the orchestra. The pianist's pearly trills were immediately contrasted with his thunderous arpeggios, leading to the statement of the second theme in the cadenza, which was perhaps one of the most beautiful moments of the evening.

The Largo's polar opposite key of E major radiated warmth from the first chords of the piano. Bronfman projected a sense of wonderment in the soft dynamics and the luminous, nearly childlike melodic play between the flute and bassoon further enhanced this quality.

The Rondo finale, an outburst of energy and folk-like lightheartedness, brought out the seamless transitions of sections as well as Bronfman's technical facility. Under Spano's direction, the orchestra set up the fugato section with a steady pulse

and focused tone, driving the momentum all the way to the coda. The enthusiastic audience ovations were rewarded with an encore by Bronfman, a stunningly played rendering of Chopin's E major Etude (Op. 10, no. 3).



Robert Spano. Photo; Angela Morris

Every listener expects a powerful experience when Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 is on the program, and Spano and the New World players did not disappoint Saturday night.

Much like Beethoven's motivic persistence, Shostakovich introduces three central gestures and obsessively builds on them. Spano's firm, yet guiding hand led the orchestra throughout the journey of this monumental work. What starts as an unassuming figuration under a sweet melody, is later transformed into a menacing motif that ramps up to become a frightful call. Every section of the New World Symphony lived

up to the technical demands and expressive challenges of this work. The strings sustained the melodic tension and suspense, the brass resounded mightily, and the woodwinds provided warmth of tone, and the percussion aided the galloping of momentum impeccably. Even amid the dense sonorities, Spano was able to heighten the textures of each new element with great clarity.

The Scherzo, a playful movement, was projected with accurate attacks and good sense of phrasing. The division of the strings and their intense vibrato created a rich tapestry of sound in the Largo movement. Although the Fifth Symphony was Shostakovich's "redemption" in the eyes of the Soviet system, this movement, in intimate whispers and loud eruptions, is imbued with a sense of oppression.

The finale comes in with blaring outbursts as a two-sided portrayal of the intended tribute to the Soviet system. The sarcastic parodies may at times get lost in Shostakovich's epic scoring, but Spano and the New World Symphony captured these elements brilliantly and provided an unwavering rendition, adding a sense of palpable tremor beneath even the most lyrical passages.

Online:

<http://southfloridaclassicalreview.com/2018/01/bronfman-spano-team-up-with-new-world-symphony-for-electrifying-night-at-the-arsht-center/>

South Florida CLASSICAL REVIEW

Sunday, February 18, 2018



Michael Tilson Thomas conducted the New World Symphony in music of Debussy and Stravinsky Saturday night at New World Center.

MTT, New World brilliantly showcase a full-plumage “Firebird”

By Lawrence Budmen

The music of Igor Stravinsky has always brought out the best in Michael Tilson Thomas and the conductor was in prime form on Saturday night, leading the New World Symphony in early and middle period Stravinsky scores.

Prior to the commencement of the concert, Tilson Thomas asked the audience at the New World Center in

Miami Beach to stand for a moment of silence in memory of the victims of the school shooting on Friday in Parkland. (The names and ages of the victims were projected on the hall’s video screens.)

Turning to Stravinsky’s *Scènes de ballet*, Tilson Thomas noted that his composition teacher Ingolf Dahl helped the busy Stravinsky complete the work in time for its Broadway premiere in December 1944. He added that he too was busy at that time getting ready to be born (which happened later that month.) *Scènes de ballet* represents the populist side of Stravinsky, just as the jazz suites and film scores of Shostakovich demonstrate a lighter side of that composer.

Originally composed for the revue “The Seven Lively Arts” (which also featured songs by Cole Porter and performances by Bert Lahr and Beatrice Lillie), the 18-minute divertissement runs the gamut from Tchaikovsky inflected dance melody to a parody of the cowboy tunes of the era. Along the way there are sly references to Gershwin’s “The Man I Love” and Stravinsky’s own *Petrushka*. With touches of Stravinsky’s neo-classical style from that era and repeated opening and closing chords of mock pomposity, the work radiates

considerable wit and charm. The score was a great showcase to display every section of the New World at top strength and Tilson Thomas conducted it with idiomatic flair.

While Stravinsky's Broadway concoction occasionally appears on concert programs, Debussy's *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra is a seldom-performed rarity. Debussy completed the work in 1890 but withdrew the score prior to the scheduled premiere, revising it repeatedly over several decades but refusing to allow publication or performance. It was finally premiered in 1919, a year after Debussy's death) but not published in complete form until 1968. This work is as close as Debussy came to writing a piano concerto and it demands a soloist with formidable technique and musicianship.

The Norwegian pianist Leif Ove Andsnes is that and more. Andsnes is an artist who puts a distinctive stamp on everything he plays. And the Debussy *Fantaisie* needs that kind of artistic salesman to make it work.

While the score is not an unforgettable masterpiece, it deserves to be played more often. The opening oboe solo of the first movement suggests typical Debussy impressionistic languor but the music soon morphs into a more romantic vein. The fleet-fingered Andsnes conveyed a full range of pianistic colors. A master at sweeping, big-boned whirls of melody and pyrotechnics, he played the Rachmaninoff-like sections at full power. In this stylistic mélange, Tilson

Thomas drew opulent playing and brought out Debussy's kaleidoscopic instrumental timbres.



Leif Ove Andsnes

The Lento and Allegro molto finale sound more like Ravel, Debussy's contemporary. Andsnes' bursts of tonal heft brought some clarity to the wispy theme of the slow movement (with two harps adding to the orchestral shimmer). The finale is jazzy in the manner of the last movement of Ravel's Concerto in G Major, written three decades later. Jazz had not even been conceived as a popular art form in the late nineteenth century so Debussy was literally inventing a musical language. Andsnes attacked this final showpiece with virtuosity but also displayed a sensitive touch in a central episode that could have come right out of Debussy's Preludes.

A cheering ovation brought Andsnes back for an encore "Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum" from Debussy's *Children's Corner Suite*. Vigorous, fistfuls of notes

and hand crossings at the outset gave way to pearly toned elegance in the lyrical episode. Andsnes' gradual buildup of the final crescendo was masterful, keeping the pulse and avoiding bombast. This terrific pianist needs to be heard more often in South Florida.

The suite from Stravinsky's *The Firebird* is a concert staple but Tilson Thomas chose to play the complete ballet score in the original 1910 version. With a doubled number of winds, no less than three harps and extra brass on the hall's terraces and rear, the performance was an exciting display of the orchestra's firepower and the auditorium's splendid acoustic.

From the barely audible rumbles of the seven basses in the first bars to the blazing finale, Tilson Thomas emphasized a wide sonic palette with sharp contrasts of tempo and dynamics. Fast sections were very fast. Yet Tilson Thomas's conception also returned the dance to this ballet score. "The Dance of the Firebird" had an edginess that differed from more sedate versions. Strings played with a dark tonal cast and the large wind contingent was outstanding. Special kudos to Elizabeth Lu's solo flute which was agile, exquisite and bright in perfect balance.

Tilson Thomas brought out the violence of the "Infernal Dance" in brisk strokes with high contrasts of timbres leaping forth from the ensemble. The big climaxes were augmented by hard-driving percussive whacks and brass

eruptions from around the hall. The warm tone of Brenton Foster's bassoon set the stately pace of the "Lullaby." Here Tilson Thomas drew out the music's romantic Russian roots and its indebtedness to Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky's teacher. The gradual coalescing of the principal theme of the finale was thrilling with the conclusion perhaps setting a new decibel level for an orchestral performance at the New World Center.

All credit to Tilson Thomas for presenting *The Firebird* as Stravinsky first conceived it in a performance that brought out the music's richness and originality with such striking brilliance.

Online:

<http://southfloridaclassicalreview.com/2018/02/mtt-new-world-brilliantly-showcase-a-full-plumage-firebird/>

South Florida CLASSICAL REVIEW

Monday, March 5, 2018



*Alberto Ginastera's String Quartet No. 1 was performed by New World Symphony members on Sunday.
Photo: Annemarie Heinrich*

New World members show versatility in 20th-century chamber program

By Inesa Gegprifti

Performing music composed within the past 85 years, members of the New World Symphony fellows were joined by Daniel Ching, founder of the Miró Quartet, in a program presented by The League of Composers Sunday afternoon at New World Center.

The repertoire chosen was a clear display of the diversity of musical idioms that emerged or developed throughout the 20th century – a period

when there was no monopoly on a mainstream stylistic identity.

The first half featured two quintessential composers of their respective cultures – Benjamin Britten was represented with his Cello Sonata and Dmitri Shostakovich with the *Five Pieces* for Two Violins and Piano.

A product of the friendship between Britten and celebrated cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, the Cello Sonata stands as a canvas of Britten's compositional language. Cellist Alexa Ciciretti and pianist John Wilson tackled the fluctuating characters of Britten's five-movement work with ease in an admirable partnership. Both performers capture the juxtaposition of its stark and sparse textures with punctuating gestures, as well as its somber yet passionate lyricism. Ciciretti's timbre evoked the lamenting sighs of the "Elegy" and Wilson's sonorous chords provided an enveloping fabric of sound that sustained the depth of the movement.

Arranged by Levon Atovmian, the five vignettes that constitute Shostakovich's lighthearted set, are a testimony to his affinity and talent for incidental music from original scores for film, ballet, and play. Violinists Alex Gonzalez, and Teddy Wiggins and pianist Anna Khanina executed these

exquisite pieces with great finesse and, despite a few tuning issues, the performance was both poised and impassioned.

A brief musical monologue for solo oboe from *Upingos* by Carlos Chávez opened the second half with a sense of timeless charm as executed by Adèle-Marie Buis.

After two brief eruptive statements, a primeval and violent yet somewhat dance-like melody over hammered chords begins Alberto Ginastera's String Quartet No. 1. Ginastera came to this genre in his early 30s, already a mature composer. Reminiscent of the rhythmic incisiveness of Bartók and Stravinsky, the first movement draws from Argentinean folk elements in a way that is disguised by Ginastera's classically-trained craftsmanship.

Violinists Daniel Ching and Emerson Millar, violist Jesse Yukimura, and cellist Alan Okhubo were fully up to the demands of this challenging music in a performance that resonated with both confidence and subtlety.

The musicians' playing in the third movement, "Calmo e poetico," took one into a journey through the vast region of the Pampas as they sustained the spaciousness of the phrasing with impeccable bow control and expressive vibrato. In a tribute to his heritage, especially that of the gaucho [cowboy], Ginastera uses his signature "guitar chord" more extensively and explicitly here, framing the sections and the melodic exchange between the higher and lower string instruments. A sense of

breathless suspension was projected through the intense musicianship of the performers. The other three movements showed off the quartet's technical facility in their navigating varying textures and compound rhythms.

The concert ended with *Danzón Cubano* by Aaron Copland, arranged for two pianos, celesta, and percussion by Michael Linville. In his two visits to Cuba in 1941, Copland was greatly impressed by the music of the island. Although this work is not an authentic representation of the original music he heard, it is yet another fitting example of the stream of exoticism, very popular in the 20th century.

The playful homophonic theme recurs in different instrumentations, with nearly child-like innocence, highlighted by the "invisible" groove as Copland inhibits some of the beats creating a sense of uncertain motion. The musicians played to the semi-suave nature of the piece with great flair and the use of maracas and steelpan enhanced the Caribbean feel of the music.

Online:

<http://southfloridaclassicalreview.com/2018/03/new-world-members-show-their-versatility-in-20th-century-chamber-rarities/>

South Florida CLASSICAL REVIEW

Sunday, May 6, 2018



*Michael Tilson Thomas conducted the New World Symphony in Mahler's Symphony No. 9 Saturday night.
Photo: Spencer Lowell*

MTT, New World close season with a sumptuous, searing Mahler Ninth

By David Fleshler

Few South Florida classical events provide the reliable rewards of Michael Tilson Thomas's season-ending Mahler concerts with the New World Symphony.

Tilson Thomas, acknowledged as one of the world's leading Mahler interpreters, led a sumptuous and searing performance of the composer's Ninth Symphony Saturday that fully lived up to the expectations generated by past Mahler concerts.

The setting sun illuminated a perfect evening in Miami Beach, drawing one of the biggest crowds of the season to spread picnic blankets outside New World Center to watch an outdoor projection of the concert.

Mahler composed his last completed symphony shortly after the death of his daughter and his own diagnosis of heart disease. These events have led commentators to explore the symphony's evocation of death, from the first-movement rhythm taken by some to mimic the composer's irregular heartbeat to the slow, peaceful fading away of the last notes more than an hour later.

It's not clear how much of this is a true picture of Mahler's intentions. But under Tilson Thomas's baton, there was a strong sense of vulnerability and tentativeness in the first minutes of the opening Andante, as violins pressed forward with a melody, then paused and moved forward again, giving the passages a searching, breathing, human quality. The

contrast couldn't have been greater when Tilson Thomas unleashed the orchestra for the movement's surging, roaring climaxes.

Playing in all sections was virtually flawless, in a symphony that's full of exposed passages for horns, flutes, trumpets and other instruments. Mahler's distinctive orchestration, with its muted trumpets and horns, violins going high up the lowest string, and other techniques by a master symphonist, came off with all its characteristic force and color.

Tilson Thomas tends to revel in the rusticity of Mahler's country dance movements, and he and the orchestra appeared to take seriously the composer's description of the second movement *Ländler* as "somewhat clumsy and very rough." The musicians came down hard on the beat with foot-stomping force, in a movement enlivened by swooping trombones and quirky, comically sinister playing by bassoon and contrabassoon.

The full power of the orchestra emerged for the Rondo-Burleske, with forceful horn, trumpet and trombone playing, in a display of orchestral muscle and virtuosity. The contrasts of the movement came off as particularly stark, as the baleful tone of the opening resolved into the nobility of a brass choir and the delicate eloquence of a theme in the strings.

Much of the work's reputation as one of Mahler's finest creations rests on the last movement, a huge Adagio that

many have taken to be the composer's farewell to the world.

The New World Symphony's outstanding string section produced a warm, luxuriant tone in the long-lined melodies that form the heart of the movement. Opening with a rich, soft-edged tone in the lower register, they ascended to the top of their range, maintaining knife-edged clarity even on the highest notes. Emotional and intense, the music flowed under Tilson Thomas' baton with a steady beat, never losing its essential pulse. The ending was finely paced, as instruments faded away and the music died out.

The concert opened with a work called *Lontano* ("Far Away") by the late Hungarian composer György Ligeti, eerie music used in the soundtrack for Stanley Kubrick's horror movie *The Shining*. The piece uses long sustained notes in dense clusters, which undergo subtle changes to create a cloudy, mysterious tonal landscape.

New World conducting fellow Dean Whiteside, who led the performance, effectively brought the music from periods of dense foggy to moments of acute, piercing clarity. To actually see this work performed by an orchestra increased the wonder of the music, as weird, extra-planetary tones emerged from the same instruments that produce the music of Beethoven and Brahms.

Online:

<http://southfloridaclassicalreview.com/2018/05/mtt-new-world-close-season-with-a-sumptuous-searing-mahler-ninth/>