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Good concerts as season draws to an end

By Pablo Bardin

Traditional ballets and Christmas performances precede a summer devoid of classics

First fortnight of the musical season, closing time. After this, some traditional ballets and Christmas concerts, and then the arid summer devoid of classical music. In March the new season gradually starts. La Bella Música has been led since its inception (2004) by Patricia Pouchulu, concert organizer who in recent years has taken up conducting with reasonable success.

Lady conductors are few in our midst, but I can also mention Lucía Zicos, Marta Luna, Charlotte Stuijt and Susana Frangi. There's some prejudice against them but if there is talent, there's no reason to object. I can mention big names in the world scene, such as Simone Young, important guest in several big opera houses, or Susanne Mälkki, appointed recently to lead the Ensemble Intercontemporain. Apart from music, Pouchulu has studied physics, literature, philosophy and French. Pedro Calderón, Carlos Vieu and Zicos have guided her in conducting, and she has studied in Europe in several courses with Michail Jurowski (Berlin) and Christian Kluttig (Lithuania).

Late in the year she has offered concerts with an ad-hoc orchestra at the Avenida . As an organizer she has presented many valuable choral-symphonic evenings in the last decade, as well as coordinating the very agreeable Sofitel Soirées Musicales Premium.

Her conducting session this year has been held at the Avenida again, and it featured our best young violinist, Xavier Inchausti. There was a 51-member picked orchestra, most of them from the B.A.

Philharmonic. They were enough for the chosen repertoire and for the acoustics of the Avenida (by the way, orchestras sound very well on the Avenida stage but muffled in the pit).

The repertoire was too run-of-the-mill for comfort, although I certainly don't question their status as major pieces.

To my mind the best interpretation was the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, for Inchausti was at the top of his very considerable form, and she was a very conscientious accompanist, so that their phrasing ran smoothly in the same direction, with good tempi, singing tone and bravura, both as soloist and with orchestra.

The two orchestral pieces were presented with care and taste, though with less punch than they need, especially Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, whose redundancy paradoxically needs great fortitude to feel justified.

Mendelssohn's The Hebrides Overture, a forerunner of the tone poems, was attractive in its evocation of Fingal's Cave. Pouchulu was clear in her gestures, but I feel they should be less symmetrical and more varied to obtain stronger contrasts.

She's on the right path. It would help visually to dress more soberly for it tends to distract. For next year, I would like something more adventurous and a feeling of greater ease. The results were positive this time , but there's room for a more personal approach.

Her final Sofitel concert was first-rate, for the Cuarteto Petrus is now our best, due to the notable quality of the players and their completely natural interaction. Pablo Saraví and Hernán Briático, violins; Silvina Álvarez, viola; and Gloria Pankaeva, cello; all four have terse, beautiful sound, fine intonation and very musical phrasing. They are ready for Europe.

And it was a fine programme of Slavic music, featuring an agreeable première, Variations on a Popular Russian Theme, ten concise pieces written in Saint Petersburg in 1898 by four relevant composers (Scriabin, Glazunov, Rimsky-Korsakov and Liadov) and six now rarely heard (Artciboucheff, Wihtol, Blumenfeld, Ewald, Winkler and Sokolov). The lovely Borodin Second Quartet and the intense First Quartet, From My Life) by Bedrich Smetana, were admirably rendered by the artists, who gave us a nice encore, a movement from Debussy's Petite Suite arranged for quartet.

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