

Programs showcase talented Latin American musicians



AVIGDOR ZOROMP

The rich musical heritage of Latin America was an important ingredient in two solo recitals in this area recently. The first of these featured Brazilian born pianist Flavio Varani, who has been on the faculty of Oakland University in Rochester for many years, and whose many performances have taken him to his native Brazil and to Europe.

His April 18 recital at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield was the closing event of the Julius Chajes Music Fund Concert Series.

The second artist was Cuban born Manuel Barrueco, who is currently on the faculty of the Peabody Conservatory. His outstanding contribution to the tradition of classical guitar has made him a featured guest throughout this continent and Europe, including appearances with some major orchestras and prominent chamber groups. His solo recital, presented as part of the Musica Viva concert series took place April 23 at the Smith Performing Arts Theater, Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills.

Of these two artists, Varani is the better known in this area through his frequent appearances here. His latest program featured works by Reynaldo Hahn, Beethoven, Debussy and Villa Lobos. Hahn, who was born in Venezuela and, like Varani, studied in France, is only occasionally featured in this country. Having lived mostly in this century his music is tonal with strong ties to the past. His Sonatina in C major has many baroque elements in a contemporary context. Varani was enjoying himself immensely with this light-hearted work, as he did with six seldom played Etudes by Debussy. He seemed also at home with two selections by Villa Lobos — "Minstrel's Impressions," and "Holiday in the Country-side." The wit and humor of the Debussy Etudes affected the audience like a magic charm.

The one mainstream work on the program — Beethoven's Sonata Op. 110, proved to be the most problematic for Varani. Being the penultimate of Beethoven's 32 sonatas, this work is a challenge to any pianist. The final movement is based on a Bach-like fugue that, with increasing complexity, reaches into the stratosphere — but it didn't quite get there in this performance. As several past performances have suggested to me, Varani's strengths lie primarily in late Romantic and early 20th century music where his ability can be truly impressive.

The art of classical guitar is invariably associated with the late Andre Segovia and some of his disciples. Manuel Barrueco was not among these — he studied with Juan Mercadal in Miami, and with Ray de La Torre in New York. His clear and refined style should place him among the elite of the classical guitar tradition.

Some composers on this program were obscure starting with the opening Suite in D Minor by Silvius Leopold Weiss who was a contemporary of Bach. While it would be hardly surprising that Bach was the greater master, this performance made this obscure work sound like a substantial work.

Other works on the program were by Fernando Sor, Lou Harrison, Chick Corea, Joaquin Rodrigo and Isaac Albeniz. The better known of these are the variations on a Mozart theme by Sor and the Tango and Asturias by Albeniz.

For those who are accustomed to the flamboyant and amplified guitar, Barrueco's playing will sound utterly uncharacteristic of the instrument, at least until one gets used to the sound.

His tone is intimate and rather introverted. At first, one would have to strain to hear this sound which seldom would rise above mezzo-forte. However, with this seemingly narrow dynamic range Barrueco is capable of inserting an almost unlimited number of shades and intensities. His music may be analogous to a work of art that may seem like a speck of dust from a distance, but which reveals some most impressive brilliance and creativity upon closer scrutiny.

Ordinary guitar players are a dime a dozen, but the art of Manuel Barrueco is a rare treasure among these vast domains.

Avigdor Zoromp, born in Poland, educated in Israel and the United States, has a Ph.D. in math and has studied piano, music theory and history.

Exchange tickets for George Burns Theatre

In case you haven't heard, the George Burns Theatre for the Performing Arts in Livonia is temporarily closed. They are seeking to reorganize and reopen.

Although they are not able to provide refunds, tickets for the George Burns Theatre will be honored and may be exchanged, one to one, for selected performances at the Palace of Auburn Hills and the New Pine Knob beginning May 15.

A listing of these performances will be available, beginning May 15, at the Palace box office. No information on show selection will be available by phone prior to May 15.

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