

PODER^{360°}

An Orchestra For Miami

Miami Symphony resurrected

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By Enrique Fernandez



Eduardo Marturet has two Miami dress codes: Loose linen casual and white tie and tails. The first he has been wearing for the past 30 years he has been coming here on vacation from his native Venezuela. The second, since he began stepping onto the conductor's podium of the Miami Symphony in 2005.

Marturet, who has conducted some of the world's greatest orchestras and is also a composer, is on a quest to turn the Miami Symphony into the city's principal orchestra, in the way cities like Los Angeles, Boston and New York have their own.

Founded in 1989, The Miami Symphony was born out of the growing Cuban and Latin American community. It was originally run as a family business by its Cuban-born founder Manuel Ochoa and his wife Sofia. When Marturet took over after Ochoa died in 2005, "We had to turn it into a corporation," he says.

With the help of Rafael Díaz-Balart, member of a well-known Cuban exile family and an international businessman, the management was streamlined. His goal is to create a board of 100 members, with a smaller governing board and an even smaller executive committee.

“It’s a new paradigm,” Díaz-Balart says. “The board is more diversified and there is corporate representation.” It’s no longer “the Cuban orchestra,” as the Miami Symphony was known. “We now have executives from Italian and Spanish companies that have Miami offices. We are reflecting the Miami that is being born.”

But the music is what matters. “My job,” says Marturet, using a vulgarity that is common to the Venezuelan lingo, “is to make 80 carajos do what I want instead of what they want.”

In fact, in the past three years, 60 percent of the symphony’s musicians are new. The conductor has made the repertoire more and more demanding while bringing in new musicians. Marturet has filled his musicians with such enthusiasm that concertmaster Daniel Andai just turned down an enticing offer in Brazil to stay in Miami with the orchestra.

Anyone who heard the older orchestra and hears it today will notice the astonishing improvement. It is now a fine orchestra on its way to becoming “the orchestra Miami deserves,” as Díaz-Balart puts it. The two men have pushed for greater goals, doubling the budget from last year and adding concerts each season.

Following the lead of Venezuela’s famed program for fostering classical music talent among the young and underprivileged—El Sistema was the birthplace of the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s young conductor Gustavo Dudamel—the Miami Symphony is sponsoring youth groups. In partnership with El Sistema, the Miami Symphony has founded the Allapattah Children and Youth Symphony and is working on a new group in Broward County.

“I’m betting on Miami,” Marturet says, pointing out the Adrienne Arsht Center, where the Symphony plays a yearly concert, “was built for a Miami that still does not exist.”

Concertmaster Andai, who leads the orchestra and renders poignant violin solos, says Miami has its own musical energy. “What Miami has is this flavor, this energy that comes from inside.” Put more succinctly: “It’s like dancing,” he says. “You want to get in a groove.”