

The Miami Herald

Posted on Mon, Apr. 12, 2010

Review | Miami Symphony shines in 'Cuckoo' by Delius

BY ALAN BECKER

South Florida Classical Review.com

The Miami Symphony Orchestra has shown marked improvement in recent years, and can now usually be relied on to perform interesting programs in a thoroughly satisfying and professional manner.

Saturday's concert at Miami Beach's Lincoln Theatre reinforced its continued growth, and for that conductor Eduardo Marturet must be given the lion's share of the credit.

Opening with *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* by Frederick Delius, the symphony introduced an English composer infrequently heard in South Florida concert programs. It is a perfectly conceived and proportioned essay in English Pastoralism, although one of the themes is derived from a Norwegian folk song.

Delius was quite a cosmopolitan, having raised oranges in Florida, taught violin in Virginia, sojourned many times with Grieg at his home in Norway, studied in Germany, and eventually settled in France with his artist wife.

On Hearing the First Cuckoo is one of those works where not one note is superfluous; nothing could be removed without doing irreparable damage to the music. Assistant conductor Jeffrey Stern conducted a performance both subtle and beautifully phrased. The orchestra played with ravishing beauty, with the oboe and strings deserving special accolades.

9/11 ATTACKS

Mark O'Connor's *Double Concerto for Violin and Cello* has its origins in the 9/11 terror attacks. Subtitled "For The Heroes," it pays tribute to those who proved their valor in the aftermath of the tragedy. The concerto, making its South Florida premiere, avoids anything mawkish, and is generally cheery and upbeat. O'Connor sticks to his American roots by incorporating folk elements, bluegrass and jazz in the concerto's three movements.

The second movement's *Waltz* leans too heavily on the folk song *I Ride an Old Paint* as it pushes on relentlessly with one bloated climax after another. During the last movement, both soloists engage in an extended cadenza that seems never to end as piles of notes fly forth like endless chatter.

O'Connor's unsubtle music leans heavily on stylistic borrowings from Copland, Don Gillis, Roy Harris and others without achieving their distinction. Unlike the Delius, the endless note-spinning could benefit from considerable pruning. It is exhausting to listen to, and must be to play, as the writing chugs along, rarely blending soloists with orchestra, but treating them as a separate concertante group. Both concertmaster Daniel Andai and cellist Ashley Garritson gave it their best shot, and were rewarded by a storm of applause.

BACK ON TRACK

Dvorak's Symphony No. 7 returned us once again to the realm of great music. The extremely self-critical composer produced a work of high quality that was beautifully developed and tautly organized. Marturet was a ball of fire on the podium, and unleashed a storm of powerful proportions from his orchestra.

The passionate music only released its tension in the waltz-like Scherzo, with the characteristics of one of the composer's *Slavonic Dances*. Still, this was only a brief respite from the tension of what is considered by many to be the composer's finest symphony. While there were a few orchestral clinkers, the playing remained strong and lustrous as the Miami Symphony climbed a little higher on the ladder of success.

© 2010 Miami Herald Media Company. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.miamiherald.com>