



## Mahler and a young piano virtuoso, served up by Miami Symphony

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The Miami Symphony Orchestra's programming has grown more conservative over the last two seasons, but Eduardo Marturet still manages to provide a couple of evenings each year that stray from populist fare. Such was the case Sunday night at the Lincoln Theatre, with Marturet and the orchestra serving up a varied program that offered a spectacular Mendelssohn performance by a young keyboard prodigy, flanked by works of Webern and Mahler.

Tackling the intensely demanding music of Mahler would have been unthinkable for the MSO just a few seasons ago, but the charismatic Marturet clearly likes to challenge his players with difficult repertoire, as was the case Sunday with Mahler's Symphony No. 4.

The most concise of Mahler's symphonies, the Fourth is characteristic in its offbeat elements, as with the weird, faux-cheerful sleigh-bells of

the opening movement and the Mephistophelian grotesquerie of the scherzo with its "mistuned" scordatura solo violin. The Adagio breathes a deeply felt lyrical expression, leading to the radiant vocal finale. A soprano soloist sings a text from Mahler's favorite folk poetry reflecting a child's view and telling—a bit ironically—of the joy and feasts that await one in heaven.

Marturet's emotional temperament is well suited to Mahler's mercurial music and the Venezuelan conductor showed an assurance and close affinity for the symphony's oddities as well as its heartfelt lyricism. There were untidy moments, with errant wind tuning and some ensemble slips, but, on the whole, this was an impressive and worthy performance, with the MSO players rising to the challenge of Mahler's music, with admirable solo horn work.

Marturet paced the long first movement with great skill and concertmaster Daniel Andai was not afraid to make an acidic sound in the devil's violin solos of the scherzo. In the slow movement, Marturet was less convincing, judging the ebb and flow well, but indulging in some extremely fussy detailing, with the coda stretched out interminably.

Soprano Susana Diaz possesses the right youthful voice and an intelligent sense of the German text to convey the poetry's naïve innocent joy. Yet the glowing finale didn't quite come off, no fault of soloist or conductor, but due to the Lincoln Theatre's voice-bleaching acoustic, which made it difficult for Diaz's words and light soprano to come across with sufficient clarity and impact.



The Felix Mendelssohn anniversary year was very well served by the evening's centerpiece, his Piano Concerto No. 1 with the extraordinary 12-year-old soloist George Li in the spotlight. One can become cynical about the extravagant claims made for the latest "incredible" preteen wunderkind, but this young man is the real thing.

The diminutive pianist looks even younger than his years, yet Li ripped into Mendelssohn's keyboard showpiece with the flash and digital bravura of a seasoned veteran. Rarely will one hear the knuckle-busting runs and flurry of notes throw off with such swagger and assurance in an artist this young. Li also showed he is not just a well-drilled whiz-kid, displaying a refined poetic sensibility in the cadenza and Andante, phrasing with nuanced shading and subtle feeling. The concluding Presto was off like a rocket with Marturet and the orchestra providing equally souped-up accompaniment for their young soloist's whirlwind prestidigitation. The clamorous ovations brought young Mr. Li out for two encores, delicately tinted Chopin and a playfully virtuosic *Flight of the Bumble Bee*.

The evening began with music of Anton Webern, and a world premiere of Marturet's orchestral arrangement of Webern's *Langsamer Satz*. A student effort from an unfinished work for string quartet, the music wasn't premiered until decades after the composer's death. Written before Webern's 12-tone hyper-minimalism, *Langsamer Satz* is a richly expressive late Romantic slow movement. Apart from the harp solo, Marturet's expansive arrangement for large orchestra largely avoids schmaltz, and makes a worthy case for Webern's surprisingly soulful outpouring, well played by the Miami Symphony musicians.