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### **MIAMI SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA EDUARDO MARTURET/ LARA ST. JOHN SMETANA/ PIAZZOLLA - DESYATNIKOV/ RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

By Lawrence Budmen

Violinist Lara St. John was a fiery soloist on October 5 at the Carnival Center's Knight Concert Hall with the Miami Symphony Orchestra under Music Director Eduardo Marturet. Her blazing performance of Astor Piazzolla's *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* proved the center of attention. Yet the Miami Symphony has come a long way in less than two seasons under Marturet. The ensemble is greatly improved and offered some fine playing.

Just as Vivaldi portrayed nature's seasons in Baroque terms, so Piazzolla has given vibrant pulse to the seasons of life and nature in his signature expression of "tango nuevo." Throbbing rhythms alternate with sentimental ruminations. Piazzolla's haunting melodies leave an indelible stamp on the listener's consciousness. Originally scored for Piazzolla's own tango band, the work seems to exist in hundreds of adaptations and transcriptions. St. John and Marturet played a rather unique arrangement by Russian composer Leonid Desyatnikov, a pupil of Shostakovich. Desyatnikov complements the composer's Stravinskian harmonics with violinistic flights of Prokofiev tinged acrobatics and witty references (by the string ensemble) to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. The result is not vintage Piazzolla but a wry historical *mélange* that is greatly entertaining.

St. John's effortless virtuosity was stunning. Playing a 1729 Guadagnini instrument, St. John emblazoned the hall's spacious acoustics with richly burnished tone, liberal rubato, and exhilarating technical gymnastics. St. John made every phrase count, her music making deeply felt and intensely stated. Her fervent musicality and incisive artistic intellect was boldly stamped on Piazzolla's entrancing score from first note to last. Acclaimed for her Bach performances, St. John is clearly a versatile, extraordinary gifted musician. A gorgeous solo by principal cellist Konstantin Litvinenko brought darker colors to this bright tonal showpiece. Marturet offered an astutely gauged accompaniment, soloist and conductor playing to each

other's strength. Here was bravura string playing and modernist aesthetics in perfect sync.

Despite an imprecise flute at the outset, Marturet led a surging performance of Smetana's Moldau (from the symphonic suite Ma Vlast). He brought cinematic sweep to this portrait of the mighty river's journey from the mountains to the gates of the city of Prague. Czech nostalgia and riveting energy were perfectly balanced. With guest concertmaster Misha Vitenson (first violin of the Amernet String Quartet) in prime form, the string tone was light and silvery (particularly in the moonlight episode).

Rimsky-Korsakov's Sheherazade requires a world class virtuoso orchestra to bring its highly colored orchestral kaleidoscope into full focus. (I heard a performance by the Boston Symphony under Rafael Fruhbeck de Burgos at Tanglewood two summers ago that literally glowed with sensuous instrumental hues.) But Marturet managed to achieve edge of the seat intensity in a taut, cogent reading. Vitenson's dazzling musicianship brought fire to the crucial solos, spinning a web of beguiling violinistic fantasy. Geoffrey Hale's bassoon solo in the second movement glowed in molten tonal frames. Marturet achieved some beautiful soft pianissimos in a poetic coda.

The Miami Symphony still has a way to go before achieving the consistent level of brilliance of the disbanded Florida Philharmonic. The wind section can be uneven; the excellent string section needs to be enlarged. Nevertheless, this is a very different orchestra than it was two seasons ago. Marturet is a highly gifted, commanding maestro who has made immense strides in building a fine ensemble.

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