

## Mambos y Fanfarria!

I would imagine that by now, Venezuela's El Sistema is well known to Fanfare readers, given that it is quite famous in the music world at large. Surely Fanfare readers are ahead of the curve on matters musical, no? Suffice it to say that, not even excepting oil, El Sistema is perhaps Venezuela's most important export: numerous countries have adopted similar programs, and I would love to see the US initiate something equivalent. The young people featured in the wind works on the present CD are remarkable musicians who play far beyond their years, their average age being about 20. The Banda Sinfónica Juvenil Simón Bolívar heard herein was founded in 2005 by Jesus Ignacio Pérez Perazzo and Valdemar Rodríguez, and is part of El Sistema. It continues in the very capable hands of current conductor Thomas Clamor.

The CD opens with music from Latin America, first with the Grand Fanfare of G Castro d'Addona, a spritely work from 1980, full of energy and good spirits. The composer is himself Venezuelan, and a product of El Sistema, in which he was trained as a trumpeter. The precise articulation and youthful verve heard here are simply not to be bettered. The work is in several contrasting sections, and closes with a furious finish. After this seven-minute delight, we hear a potpourri of music by Pérez Prado, a fairly well known Cuban bandleader who lived from 1916–1989. He became especially well known as a composer for his mambos, of which the two offered here seem quintessential of the genre. This may not be exactly "classical" music, but it is irresistible in its toe-tapping inducements, and offers the performers opportunities to vocalize (just as does Bernstein's famous "Mambo" from West Side Story).

The "Danza Final (Malambo)" from the ballet Estancia by Alberto Ginastera might be the best-known classical work ever to come out of Argentina—at least up here in the Estados Unidos. Even though I've played violin in this piece in its original orchestral version several times, I hardly missed the strings, so skillfully done is this arrangement by David John. Venezuela might be a long way from Argentina (as you know if you've ever looked at a map of South America), but these musicians have this music in their blood.

I did miss the strings somewhat more in the arrangement of Bolero. There's just something about the suave sound of stringed instruments that's hard to replicate in any version of Bolero shorn of them. Still, the arrangement of Henk Lijnschooten works well, and produces a host of colors, which (after all) is what Bolero is all about.

It's probably not widely known that Felix Mendelssohn produced a couple of original works for concert band, but his Concert Piece No. 1 in F Minor is not one of them. Originally composed for the two solo instruments with piano accompaniment, Mendelssohn a year later (1833) arranged it for string orchestra accompaniment. The two solo instruments featured in the piece are the clarinet and the basset horn, a somewhat deeper member of the family similar but not identical to the alto clarinet. The two soloists, Valdemar Rodriguez and Victor Mendeza, play with the utmost purity of tone and beauty of expression, exquisitely matching each other, phrase by phrase.

Of the approximately 70 arrangements for concert band (not all of which treat the entire work) of Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition known to me, that of Mark Hindsley, noted band director of the University of Michigan Band for many years, was second in chronology, dating from 1959. Its only antecedent for these forces was produced c. 1941 by Erik Leidzen. Both of these early arrangements have been bettered subsequently by others (I'm particularly

awaiting the commercial recording of the one by Fanfare's own Merlin Patterson, who was kind enough to give me a sneak preview of his arrangement from a live performance about a year ago), but both receive performances today, even with all the competing versions. Hindsley's version is significantly indebted to Ravel's orchestral version, and indeed, his son confirmed to me that he was attempting to make a band equivalent of the Ravel. Thus, all of the famous instrumental solos in Ravel (the opening trumpet, the horn at the beginning of the second Promenade, the solo alto saxophone in "Il vecchio Castello" etc.) are duplicated in this version.

Hindsley certainly knew the colors of the symphonic wind ensemble well, and most of the movements are quite successful. The main failing in this version (and that of several other band arrangers) is his failure to preserve Mussorgsky's original key relationships between the movements. Most jarring is the transition from the end of the second Promenade, which ends on an E<sup>?</sup>-Major chord, to the beginning of "Il vecchio Castello," which Mussorgsky sets in the parallel (enharmonic) key of G<sup>?</sup>-Minor. In Hindsley's hands, this becomes G Minor, which key's tonic chord contains no common notes with the ending chord of the Promenade. Now, it is quite understandable why Hindsley (and others) have recast the movements that Mussorgsky wrote in G<sup>?</sup> Minor into the more band-friendly key of G Minor (in the former, B<sup>?</sup> instruments, such as clarinet and cornet, would have to read in seven sharps), but modern bands can handle such keys, and most contemporary versions preserve Mussorgsky's important key relationships in the work. Besides, G<sup>?</sup> Minor is not that easy a key to play on stringed instruments either, and yet orchestral arrangers don't tamper with the key structure.

Thomas Clamor's forces handle this difficult work amazingly well, and their rendition compares extremely favorably—and even surpasses in places—other fine readings by Frederick Fennell and Hindsley himself. The only criticism in Clamor's version that I can come up with (and those who have read any number of my Pictures reviews know how seldom it is that I have but one negative thing to say about a given performance) comes at the beginning of "Limoges," where in the second measure, and similar measures throughout the movement, the accompanying 16th notes in the cornet part are much too soft, rendering the accompaniment in those measures almost inaudible. Even though they are marked piano, they must still be heard.

In short, these performances are such that if someone played this CD for me and told me that the band in question was the Dallas Wind Symphony, or one of the other major bands of our time, I would have no trouble believing him, such is the degree of precision and polish that these young people bring to bear on this music. Recommended, then, to a far larger audience than just band enthusiasts, although certainly none of them will want to miss this disc.

*David DeBoor Canfield*

**GEN 13260**  
**Fanfare**  
**10/9/2013**