

Mambos y Fanfarria!

Banda Sinfonica Jevenil is the wind adjunct of the famous Sistema movement from Venezuela. From that information alone, you know these are virtuoso performances played with enthusiasm and spirit. The only question is whether the music and arrangements are on the same level. The short answer is they are.

Modeste Moussorgsky's Pictures has been arranged for orchestra by many transcribers, as well as for brass ensemble, organ, and even solo instruments, so why not wind ensemble, especially if the arrangement and playing are on this high level. Mark Hindsley's work was clearly influenced by the Ravel orchestration, so if you like that, you'll like this. The playing is sleek, smooth, and spirited—a description that fits all these performances.

Ravel's Bolero is so outstanding in this arrangement by Henk Lijnschooten that I barely missed the strings, which don't come thematically into play until after the pivotal trombone solo. At that point I thought, "Wow, it really is possible for clarinets to sound like a string section". That trombone solo, by the way, is one of the smoothest and warmest I've ever heard.

Ginastera's 'Malambo' from Estancia may be more exciting played by winds than by orchestra—at least by these winds. The Prado pieces are 'Que Rico Mambo' and 'Mambo No. 8. I don't follow this genre at all, but even I liked them in this guise.

The oddity in a program like this is the Mendelssohn. Venezuelan clarinetist Valdemar Rodriguez is a product of Sistema, principal clarinet in the Simon Bolivar Orchestra, and founder of the Banda Sinfonica. The younger Victor Mendoza is also part of the Bolivar. Both are active in teaching and playing in Latin America and elsewhere, and both are terrific clarinetists. The original form of the Mendelssohn accompaniment is for strings only, so this transcription is a complete change of color. No problem. The performance is so warm, sweet, and idiomatic, you'd think Mendelssohn arranged it himself.

Giancarlo Castro D'Addona is a trumpet player and also a product of Sistema. Grand Fanfare is in ABA form. The A sections make one of the most exciting, vigorous, and difficult fanfares I've heard in a while. The midsection is broadly lyrical, producing symphonic-cumcinematic sound. There is more than a hint of John Williams here, but this work is more stirring, colorful, and exciting than anything I've heard from Williams in this genre. Castro D'Addona has written a brass quintet. If it is half as good as this piece, I want to hear it.

If you like band and wind music even a little, this disk is irresistible, and the sound is terrific.

Roger Hecht