

Simone Porter Triumphs as Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Open Immortal Beethoven Festival at Walt Disney Concert Hall

By **Laurence Vittes** on October 2, 2015 at 10:42am

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The opening of Gustavo Dudamel's Beethoven cycle at Walt Disney Concert Hall was dominated by Simone Porter, who wove the chains of musical enchantment in Beethoven's two Romances with such ferocious choreography that **it might have been a dancer playing the fiddle instead of a violinist moving in time with the music**. At times the music seemed to rival the greatest moments of Beethoven's mighty Violin Concerto in its intense, heard-rending beauty.

Dressed in a ruby red appropriate to the heavy overtones of the cycle's moniker, Immortal Beethoven, 18-year old Porter moved with a spontaneous sense of inner choreography that caught the musical pleasure she delivered with her creamy tone, passionate phrasing, and near perfect timing.



Simone Porter in gold in Bogotá in July with Gustavo Dudamel and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela

Symphonies 1 and 2 were not so lucky. Though the Los Angeles Philharmonic played with absorbing focus and breathtaking physical beauty, they did not sound happy, buoyant, light. The first two symphonies are youthful expressions of power and delight and yet each movement was played older: at a healthy, moderate pace, with lovely intonation and near Rubenesque roundness of sound, not too big not too small. And no personality, no soul. If they had been faster, played with more incisive, dynamic energy, they could have added in the immense physical energy which makes Beethoven so immortal, and encouraged the audience to be even louder and more enthusiastic.

The energy in the hall was great, a few empty seats but lots of kids, and teenagers dating, and people really into the music. Sounding taught and smooth, the Philharmonic took Beethoven on a sumptuous, well-upholstered cruise which warmed up the WDCH's sometimes off putting brightness. The ushers were exceptionally cheerful and concerned with comfort and safety, and the whole ambience was young and exciting.

Next up: Symphonies Three and Four with the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela who are, along with Dudamel, the most famous classical music products of El Sistema. If you believe that it is primarily the orchestra that makes the music, these performances could be dangerously different in sound, character and attitude.

Stay tuned.