



Review: Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra

November 15, 2014

Orin Chism

There's a new face on the podium for the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra's concerts this weekend, but he's no stranger. He's Andrés Franco, who's had much experience with the orchestra though generally not on the main classical series.

After his delightful program of music by Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber and Dmitri Shostakovich in Bass Hall on Friday night, one longs to hear his music-making more often.

Franco projected a sense of personality in three quite different pieces of music, while drawing exceptional playing from the orchestra.

He launched the festivities with music from Copland's best-known work, *Appalachian Spring* — a fitting choice, since Friday was Copland's 114th birthday.

Franco's interpretation, as well as some superb playing by soloists within the orchestra, created a strongly atmospheric performance.

Copland has defined what the music of frontier America should sound like, of course — nice trick for a boy from Brooklyn — and there's a pleasant sense of recognition as the music of *Appalachian Spring* unfolds. But there's more than nostalgia involved; this is really strikingly attractive music.

There was one questionable thing: At the end of Copland's work, Franco signaled for quiet, and held the silence so long it began to seem an affectation. Finally some impatient soul in the audience started the applause.

The Barber work of the evening was his *Violin Concerto*, with Simone Porter as the soloist. This is a work of much beauty, and in recent years shows definite signs of becoming a permanent member of the violin repertoire.

Porter proved to be a master of the work, with lovely playing and virtuoso chops in the spectacular final movement. She got a well-deserved ovation.

Franco scored again with the final work of the evening, Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 9*. This is a work for those who dislike Shostakovich's music. In striking contrast to the gloom and bombast so characteristic of his earlier symphonies, No. 9 is a hoot, with music that is close to laugh-out-loud witty and irrepressibly high spirited (it's also short).

Franco and the orchestra gave a performance that was full of personality and undoubtedly left many in attendance in a better mood when they left than when they came in.