

Orquestra de Sao Paulo

Press Reviews
US Tour 2006

washingtonpost.com

Orquestra's Fluent Brazilian -- and Russian

Monday, November 6, 2006; C02

Brazil's Orquestra de Sao Paulo might not possess quite the sheen of the most famous philharmonics, but Friday night at Strathmore its players displayed a raw exuberance that made music by their countrymen shine. Which brought up the question: Can they play Rachmaninoff?

Turns out that they can. Performing Symphony No. 2, conductor John Neschling turned out phrases that were heartfelt, sincere and resounding. The ensemble's flawless intonation and the final movement's rollicking punch made the performance a complete success.

Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos's passion for the cello was abundantly apparent in his Cello Concerto No. 2, in which honey-toned soloist Antonio Meneses showed off every aspect of his impressive technique. It's a work of contrasts, with melodies both jagged and smooth over a Bach-like counterpoint. In the middle section, a low brass chorale lent the work depth and solidity, which was followed by a carnival atmosphere evoked by the orchestra's powerful winds and brass. In the captivating cadenza, Meneses seemed to play all four of his cello's strings simultaneously, emulating the entire orchestra by himself.

Carmargo Guarnieri, Villa-Lobos's contemporary, masterfully wove South American flair into his Overture Concertante. Infectious rhythms, castanets and insistent timpani permeated the piece. The languid middle section temporarily stalled forward motion, but the exquisitely executed bassoon solo, followed by the return of the timpani, effectively recharged the orchestra.

-- Gail Wein

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The Charlotte Observer

THE SKINNY ON MUSIC STEVEN BROWN

November 10, 2006

Page 19H

A fine concert from Brazilian orchestra, cellist

You'd have thought the pipes looming behind the Belk Theatre stage were hooked up. Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2 rumbled out in tones with the resonance of a pipe organ. Nothing this commanding had taken hold of the Belk since – well, since the last time the Carolinas Concert Association brought a touring orchestra to town.

On Monday, it was the Orquestra de Sao Paolo from Brazil. The group could whisper, too. Conductor John Neschling pulled back the strings almost to the vanishing point during the slow movement's idyllic clarinet tune. The scene became a faraway world of its own.

Maybe a few of the in-between sonorities had hard edges. But the orchestra turned the lush symphony into the musical equivalent of a wide-screen cinematic spectacular.

The theater was maybe a third full.

The orchestra didn't have the name recognition of, say, the New York Philharmonic – which drew a full house to Ovens Auditorium in 2003. Nor did the night's soloist, Brazilian cellist Antonio Meneses, though he played a Heitor Villa-Lobos concerto with vigor and assurance equaling the orchestra's.

Before the concert, CCA's president, Sandy Washburn, stepped onstage and thanked the scattered concertgoers for coming. Then she asked everyone to bring friends in the future. I think she's onto something.

Non profit groups have virtually no money for advertising. Newspapers can run stories about who's coming to town, but some people (surprise!) don't read the paper. Maybe it's up to music lovers to recruit kindred spirits, the way religious groups and political resistance fighters do. Pass the word...The Skinny On Music.

STEVEN BROWN

Durham



Orquestra de Sao Paulo: Brazil to Russia

by Jeffrey Rossman

November 7, 2006, Durham, NC: If you were to conjure up images of two of the most disparate climates and cultures in the world, you'd have a hard time beating Brazil vs. Russia. One is a land of balmy beaches, a vast ethnic melting pot, and sexual freedom; the other is cold, culturally insulated and repressive. That doesn't stop great musicians from playing authentic and stirring renditions of "foreign" music, as happened at Page Auditorium when the Orquestra de Sao Paulo (OSESP) included Tchaikovsky's monumental fifth symphony on their program.

OSESP is reputed to be the premiere orchestra in Latin America, and under the direction of artistic director and conductor John Neschling they have gained a worldwide reputation. Their appearance at Duke University was part of a relatively brief tour of the east coast of the U.S. This was a rainy, dismal election night resulting in one of the smallest audiences for a major Duke Performances presentation – but those hearty souls in attendance got to hear a magnificent orchestra and some great works.

The first half of the program was devoted to native sons of Brazil, Camargo Guarnieri and Heitor Villa-Lobos, considered the most influential and important Brazilian composers. Guarnieri's *Overture Concertante* is a rambling work alternating between jagged, Latin rhythms and lyrical sections — some nice ideas and playing, but ultimately overlong and predictable. This concert was about midpoint in their tour and there was a sense of boredom and "day at the office" playing that did not bode well for the rest of the night; however, that quickly and dramatically changed.

Villa-Lobos was an incredibly prolific composer who is universally respected but continues to suffer from not quite breaking through into the rotation of big-name orchestra repertoire. The big exception, as far as his popularity and exposure, is his compositions for classical guitar. A great deal of similar compositional structure and harmonic ideas used in his guitar works was present in his second cello concerto, performed by Antonio Meneses. Villa-Lobos' primary instrument was the cello, but I would be quite surprised if he had ever heard anyone even coming close to the technical and artistic command exhibited by Meneses. This is a big 4-movement concerto, with evocative orchestration and a perfect amalgam of Villa-Lobos' style and sound. Meneses, who is the current cellist in the Beaux Arts Trio, effortlessly tossed off sizzling fast octave scales, piston-like spiccato bowing, and a remarkable full and silky tone. At times it seemed like he was overpowering the orchestra. This was one of the most spectacular feats of cello playing I have ever heard.

A few years back, on this same stage, the Moscow Symphony played this most Russian of symphonies – Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 in E minor. They seemed to own it and it was hard to imagine anyone even coming close to that performance. OSESP changed that opinion – although it was *their* unique personality and style. The first movement was quite a bit faster than I had heard before but it eventually seemed convincing and natural.

The slow Andante Cantabile movement was played with such pathos and feeling that it was as if they all had a Russian soul. The one unusual practice was that conductor Neschling had little or no break between movements. Each of these sections has its own character and this *attaca* style failed to let the emotions of each movement sink in and resonate. As anyone who ever played this symphony knows, this is great fun, with the

most exciting being the exhilarating finale. The OSESP milked it for all its brilliance, with the result being a resounding standing ovation that resonated like a full house. They returned for two interesting, but unannounced encores. The first was a fascinating Latin-tinged dance featuring the orchestra becoming one big percussion instrument. The second, a long and Romantic-style sounding movement, is still a mystery! Would it have been such a hardship to announce these selections?

A special thanks to Kathy Silbiger, director of Duke Performances, who generously provided tickets to this concert free of charge to members of the Duke Symphony Orchestra.

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Life Old Gold & Black

Thursday, November 16, 2006 B7

Final Secret show provides a spectacle for audience

By Lauren O'Keefe | Staff writer

The last Secret Series event of the fall 2006 semester did not disappoint those who attended the performance. The Orquestra de Sao Paulo, a Latin American orchestra founded in 1953, astounded the audience with their lively, engaging presentation.

The orchestra has had its ups and downs, but in the past 9 years, they have gone under a major renovation under artistic director John Neschling. The orchestra has taken tours throughout Latin America, the United States, Europe, and Brazil. Currently, they are taking a tour of the United States in 14 cities.

The orchestra has a contract signed with a Brazilian recording company to release a collection of CDs which feature classical pieces. Neschling has also worked to create a variety of educational programs with the help of the state government.

On Nov 8, the Orquestra de Sao Paulo performed our incredible pieces in Wait Chapel. Before this extraordinary performance, Professor Patricia Dixon poke about the pieces being played and the history of the orchestra.

The energetic opening piece, by Jeronimo Gimenez, called "La Boda de Luis Alonso" woke up the audience to the fact that this orchestra was one worth giving your full attention to and staying to the end of their performance. This is a classic Latin American piece written in 1896.

The next two pieces, one before the intermission and one after, were by Heitor Villa-Lobos. The

extremely famous Brazilian nationalist composer. This man not only contributed to nationalism in Brazil but was also an educator.

Villa - Lobos wanted his music to have a Brazilian flavor. He even took his music over to Europe to show it off. The piece premiered with the New York Philharmonic in 1955.

Villa - Lobos, according to Dixon, wanted to "elevate standards of teaching in Brazil, he convinced the secretary of education to establish choral programs in the schools."

The first piece they played, "Concerto No. 2 for Cello and Orchestra" featured Antonio Meneses as the accomplished cello soloist. Meneses has played all over the world and has collaborated with a variety of performers.

This cello concerto started serene and sentimental but by the third movement became a lively, dancing piece. The piece featured Villa-Lobos' instrument, the cello, as the focal point. Meneses played with a deep passion throughout the piece which resulted in a true spectacle for the audience members.

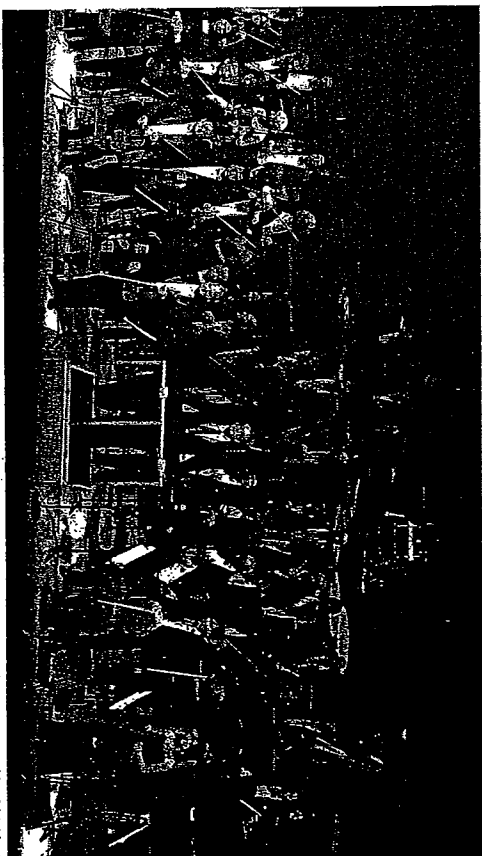
The second piece by Villa - Lobos, "Bachianas Brasileiras No. 4," was played after the intermission. This piece honors Bach while, at the same time taking its inspiration from Brazilian nationalism and culture.

The last piece of the concert was by Latin American nationalist composer, Alberto Ginestra. Dixon said that this composer was "radically different" than Villa-Lobos. He was a perfectionist who only let 50 works behind because he was so critical of

his own work.

The piece played on Wed Nov 8, "Espanca: Ballet Suite" tells the story of a worker on a farm, from dawn to dusk. There are many juxtaposing tonalities as Dixon pointed out and the piece goes from slow and melodic to fast and rhythmic. The concert ended with a standing ovation and

the orchestra played an encore in which they stomped their feet to the rhythm of the music. This concert was a great opportunity for the University's students and for the community. It's no everyday that one can hear an outstanding Brazilian orchestra.



Albert Brown/Old Gold & Black

The Latin American. Orquestra de Sao Paulo amazed the audience at Secret.

Posted on Sat, Nov. 11, 2006

CONCERT REVIEW**'Orchestra' shines, but tenor leaves audience wanting**

BY LAWRENCE BUDMEN
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Tenor José Cura and Brazil's Orquestra de Sao Paulo were the combustible combination at the Concert Association's first program at the Carnival Center's John S. and James L. Knight Concert Hall on Thursday. With conductor John Neschling firing up the Latin-accented musical offerings, the energy level never flagged.

The Sao Paulo ensemble is an orchestral powerhouse that can hold its own on the world stage. Antonio Carlos Gomes' *Overture to Il Guarany* showcased the group's crisp winds and thunderous brass. Neschling played this Verdi imitation to the hilt.

The ensemble's lush strings shone resplendently in the opening movement of Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 4*. Neschling brought coherence to this unwieldy mixture of Bach, Tchaikovsky, Hollywood, and indigenous Brazilian music. A pupil of renowned Viennese pedagogue Hans Swarowsky (who also taught Zubin Mehta and Claudio Abbado), Neschling is a superb orchestra builder and musical colorist who brings subtle musicality to the flashiest of scores.

The orchestra's final tour de force was Ginastera's *Estancia Ballet Suite*. Ravishing duos of flute and strings captured the languorous sentimentality of the *Wheat Dance*. A high-voltage rendition of the concluding *Malambo* brought the audience to its feet.

Cura, however, was the concert's real draw. At a time when the opera world is searching for replacements for the beloved Three Tenors, Cura has the vocal resources and charisma to make his presence felt.

This tenor's vocal ardor and darkly burnished lower and middle registers have the allure of Plácido Domingo but his singing can be uneven. *Vesti la giubba* from Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* was emotionally over the top, sung at an unrelenting forte. In two arias from Puccini's *Tosca*, Cura's impassioned vocalism and sensuous, dulcet soft tones held the house enthralled.

In two boleros (*Somos novios* and *Esta tarde vi llover*), Cura sang with the casual ease of Frank Sinatra or Tony Bennett. But three arias and two pop songs was rather paltry for the audience of approximately 1,700 that paid \$75.00 and \$125.00 for top seats in the 2,400 seat hall.

Cura's banter with the conductor took up precious time when he could have been singing additional arias. Rather than performing a recital, he seemed instead to be auditioning for a cabaret act. When he returned at the program's conclusion, Cura chastised the audience for leaving at intermission. Unfortunately, the audience members he felt compelled to chastise weren't the ones who had left.

For encores Cura offered a lovely, surprisingly understated Spanish love song (with exquisite harp accompaniment) and a ringing, stentorian version of *Nessun Dorma* from *Turandot*. By sheer force of voice and personality, Cura came and conquered, but vocal lovers deserved to hear more of this powerhouse tenor in the operatic oeuvre for which his voice is so well suited.

Orlando Sentinel

Music Review: Orquestra de Sao Paulo

Scott Warfield

Special to the Sentinel

November 13, 2006

The 2006-07 Festival of Orchestras season opened on Sunday afternoon at the Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre with a demonstration of the principle that appearances can be deceiving. The visitors were the Orquestra de Sao Paulo, a relatively new ensemble on the international scene, led by their low-key music director, John Neschling.

Absent much of a reputation in the United States, there was no reason to hope for anything beyond a decent afternoon of music-making from this group, and for the first half of the program everything went about as expected.

The opening overture to *La boda de Luis Alonso*, a zarzuela by the Spaniard Jeronimo Gimenez, was interesting chiefly for its obscurity and its characteristically Spanish themes. It was well played by the Orquestra de Sao Paulo.

Next was the only Brazilian work on the announced program, the Cello Concerto No. 2 by Heitor Villa-Lobos, with Antonio Meneses as the soloist. Again, the attraction of this work was its newness to an American audience. The concerto's Latin flavor derived primarily from its rhythmic patterns and the solo cello's occasional imitation of the guitar. Meneses handled the solo part, which eschewed virtuosity for its own sake, in a suitably understated fashion.

As good as the first part of the program had been, things moved to an entirely new level after intermission, beginning with Sergei Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2.

The sound of the Orquestra de Sao Paulo, which had been quite full to that point, seemed to grow ever bigger as the work progressed. The strings had a richness that was perfectly suited to this music, and it's impossible to imagine the third movement's "big tune" played any better than it was here. There were also plenty of well-played solos by the principal winds and brass, and the fourth movement was nothing but one wave after another of gorgeous sound. Having made their point with the Rachmaninoff, Neschling and the Orquestra de Sao Paulo then offered up two exceptional encores.

First was "Mourao," variations on a tune that presumably originated in the Portuguese district of that name by the Brazilian composer Cesar Guerra Peixe. The piece was a rollicking, foot-stomping (literally by the string section) presentation of an energetic folk tune that even included three percussionists wandering onto the stage in imitation of street musicians.

