

Entertainment

Academia Bach, Petrus quartet and **La bella música** kick off 2010

Great start for several music seasons



By Pablo Bardin

For the Herald

The musical season is finally upon us, after some pre-season isolated concerts. I have just come back from a trip to Chiquitanía (a region of Bolivia) to experience their astonishing Baroque Festival (more about this later in May) and this made me miss the starts of Nuova Harmonia, who presented the ensemble Gli Archi (debut), *Festivales Musicales* (Horacio Lavandera in an all-Chopin programme, an homage to the composer's bicentennial) and Pilar Golf (the chamber version of Orff's *Carmina*

Burana). But I caught before I left some concerts I want to share with Herald readers.

Through the years I have admired and enjoyed the work of the Bach Academy, a "daughter" of *Festivales* led by Mario Videla with acumen and taste. We had a visiting group making its debut in the first concert of the Academy: the Madrigalchor Munich directed by Martin Steidler. In the privileged acoustics of the Central Methodist Church (the Academy's usual venue) they gave us a fine account of themselves in an important all-German repertoire. They began with Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672), to my mind the first really great composer of that country, as shown by his beautiful psalm setting *Die mit Tränen säen* ("Those who sow with tears", No. 126). Mendelssohn had a very serious side to his temperament, balancing the mercurial charm of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; his powerful motet *Warum toben die Heiden* ("Why do the nations so furiously rage together") sets Psalm No. 2 with stark grandeur.

Friedrich Rückert wrote two poems with the same title: *Nachtwache* ("Night Vigil"). They were set by Brahms with intimate feeling, and were nicely rendered by a choir that some minutes ago had articulated with fine precision and strength the contrapuntal lines of the psalms. Max Reger's severe Neo-Baroque language is very respectable but can get oppressive, as happens in his *Three Spiritual Songs*, Op. 138, which sound accomplished but academic; not so in another work of his, a famous passage from *Ecclesiastes*, *O Tod, wie bitter bist du* ("O Death, how bitter art thou"), a long tragic lament of undoubted tragic impact in Reger's setting. Johann Sebastian Bach's monumental motet *Jesu, meine Freude* ("Jesus, my joy") lasts 21 minutes and is one of his most important scores. It is quite a challenge for a choir, and Steidler's steady command got fine results from the fresh, young, disciplined voices.

I joyfully welcome the birth of a new Argentine quartet, called *Petrus*, for this genre is the purest form of chamber music and can be delectable in proper hands – and these certainly are. Pablo Saraví and Hernán Briático (violins), Silvina Álvarez (viola) and Gloria Pankaeva (cello) are already a real team: they know that quartet playing is a subtle interlacing of voices and that good results depend on quality execution from each partner and fluid dialogue. I expected a high level from the violinists, but I was surprised by the ladies: the young violist is quite a find, with her terse timbre and clean articulation, and Pankaeva brought us the best of the Slavic school, with especially fine intonation. All four work hand-in-glove and have a true sense of style.

The programme brought a welcome rarity (maybe a première?): the *Five Novellettes* op.15 by Glazunov, an incredibly talented 16-year-old in 1881: with fine technique, charm and inspired melody, the five parts amounting to 28 minutes are named (and respond to their denominations faithfully): "Alla spagnola", "Orientale", "Interludium in modo antico", "Valse" and "All'Ungherese". The best of Haydn is found in his quartets: op. 76 No. 2, "of the fifths" (reference to the predominant interval of the first movement), is one of his maturest. An all-time favorite ended the concert: *Quartet* op.96, *American*, by Dvorák, perennially fresh in its ideas. And freshness also applies to the encore: the *Criolla* by our Luis Gianneo.

The Sofitel series programmed by La Bella Música (led by Patricia Pouchulu) "Soirées Musicales" got off to a fine start in a promising year. The intimate Jean Mermoz hall has agreeable acoustics. Claudio Barile is flute soloist of the Buenos Aires Philharmonic and has a vast trajectory. He was accompanied by Viviana Lazzarin, keyboard player (piano and harpsichord) of the Camerata Bariloche. They were a well-integrated duo.

Barile gave us a running commentary on the works they chose, even giving musical examples in the case of J. S. Bach's *Sonata in B minor, BWV 1030*. However, I prefer a less colourful, plainer phrasing in Bach, and certainly a harpsichord instead of a piano. But apart from this, the rest of the programme seemed to me right in both style and execution. French subtle harmonies go well with Barile's variety of timbre, and he was very convincing in three attractive scores: the *Fantasy for flute and piano* by Fauré, a contest piece with a slow and a fast part; the very apposite arrangement (called *Bilitis*) by Georges Lambert and Jung-Wha Lee of Debussy's *Six Antique Epigraphs*; and

Eugène Bozza's Image for flute solo. Lazzarin gave us clean playing and some subtleties of phrasing.

The programme ended with a less-known Piazzolla: the Etude 6 for flute solo, and a series written for Paris, Histoire du tango, in its four chronological evocations: "Brothel", "Café 1930", "Night Club" and "Concert d'aujourd'hui". Both scores are interesting and the artists played them finely.

As usual in these concerts, there were champagne (before) and appetizers (after) in the contiguous hall.