

Orchestral virtuosity in the season opener at the Municipal de Santiago

Maestra Alejandra Urrutia led the Santiago Philharmonic in an acclaimed programme with pieces by Bartók, Ginastera and Gabriela Lena Frank.

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In March last year, music by women composers was played with force at the Teatro Municipal de Santiago by the renowned Chilean conductor Alejandra Urrutia. Part of that spirit was revived in the season opening of the traditional space, with a female composer in the programme and once again the maestra Urrutia on the podium.

But the unity of the musical offerings on this occasion went beyond that. There were three pieces that basically gave the opportunity for a great orchestra to shine, in this case the Philharmonic Orchestra of Santiago, an ensemble that after the pandemic has managed to maintain a high artistic standard, both sonically and programmatically.

The trio of pieces is also linked in terms of the flow of influence of their composers. The fundamental Hungarian composer Béla Bartók influenced the great Argentinean maestro Alberto Ginastera, who in turn influenced the Peruvian-American composer Gabriela Lena Frank, the latter a creator of the present.

Frank's 'APU' was performed, a vast orchestral fresco, full of the rhythmic and melodic airs of deep Peru that inspire this interesting composer. Urrutia conducted with total conviction, seeking to be persuasive about the piece's strengths, and the musicians responded in the best possible way.

Ginastera's Variaciones Concertantes laid bare the individual voices of the orchestra. His highly sensitive musical material came across splendidly in the hands of Urrutia and the musicians, while the final movement, a lively malambo, stood as a stratospheric climax.

Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra needs no introduction. A sublime work, well known to regular Chilean audiences, it is music that never ceases to amaze for its brilliance, and for the display of virtuosity it draws from an orchestra.

Urrutia's version is summed up in the importance of the contrast of the material, of the balance of the tutti versus the sectional showcasing of the orchestra. Once again she shows that the Philharmonia is an orchestra that can tackle orchestral works of the highest calibre.

And so it will be throughout the season, with Stravinsky's 'The Rite of Spring' next (March 17th and 18th), and later in the year, Liszt's 'Faust' Symphony (May 13th and 16th).