

South Florida CLASSICAL REVIEW

Golijov's moving "Isaac" sparks memorable New World program

By Lawrence Budmen

Sun Nov 15, 2009

Argentine-born composer Osvaldo Golijov has made his reputation as a fusion artist, often combining Judaic, Latin, gypsy and contemporary classical idioms in his scores. *The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind* (originally conceived for clarinet and string quartet) was the work that put Golijov on the creative map in 1994. Klezmer clarinetist David Krakauer brought the expanded string-orchestra version of this work to the New World Symphony Saturday night at the Lincoln Theater.

Golijov's music can be highly uneven. Sometimes the crossover elements mix uneasily with the composer's modernist bent. *Isaac the Blind*, however, is one of Golijov's finest achievements. Klezmer music is the heart and soul of this score; yet Golijov takes this Eastern European folk tradition to a new level.

In the course of the work's five movements, the clarinet wails cries of pain, evokes visions of prayerful contemplation and soars with the joy of a wedding feast. Alternating toe-tapping dances with ruminative yearning, Golijov peppers folk allusions with layers of astringent dissonance and harmonics that suggest the sacred works of Messiaen. *Isaac the Blind* is a distinctive creation that manages to delight, move and challenge the listener at the same time. While some of the instrumental lines suggest the work's quartet origins, the composer's orchestral expansion is skillfully crafted.



David Krakauer

Krakauer, a fervent advocate of this unique work, has recorded the original version with the Kronos Quartet. A master of the klezmer clarinet, Krakauer seemed to live and breathe the score's roller coaster of emotions and hybrid idioms. He spun trills and runs in the instrument's highest register that verged on the outer limits of the clarinet's technical capacity. Krakauer held one climactic high note for what seemed like minutes on end. Some of his most beautiful playing was in the softly mesmeric stanzas of the introduction and epilogue, painting visions of mysticism.

Principal guest conductor Alasdair Neale and the New World string players matched Krakauer's passion and uninhibited vigor in an incendiary performance. In response to a standing, cheering ovation, Krakauer offered a bravura improvisation and traditional klezmer dance tune (to high energy string accompaniment) that had the audience clapping along.

Golijov's opus is a hard piece to follow but Neale's intense traversal of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.6 (*Pathétique*) was far from anti climactic. The conductor offered an interpretation in the Furtwangler-Stokowski mold, marked by wild fluctuations of tempo and angst ridden surges of tempestuous drama.

The rich tonal bloom of the strings (vibrato generously applied) and dynamic brass galvanized this high wire rendition. Supple clarinet and bassoon solos in the first movement offered moments of quiet introspection, the calm before Tchaikovsky's storm. Neale achieved a full range of dynamic contrasts, thinning the strings down to the softest of pianissimos. A powerful reading of the final Adagio lamentoso, Tchaikovsky's last musical testament, capped this expertly realized performance.

Conducting fellow Edward Abrams opened the program with Prokofiev's bombastic *American Overture*. Abrams and the orchestra made the best case for this potboiler, a mere footnote in Prokofiev's catalogue.