



Exceptional Gifts

LAWRENCE BUDMEN reports from the 2009 Miami International Piano Festival

The Miami International Piano Festival has presented many impressive keyboard artists over more than a decade of its existence but the twelfth annual edition on 14-17 May 2009 at the Lincoln Theater in Miami Beach, Florida, USA proved the most impressive yet. Not only was each of the performing artists an interpreter of exceptional gifts but every single performance on the highly varied programs carried its quota of visceral sparks and insightful revelation...

The 2009 festival concluded with *Beyond Tango*, a joyous evening showcasing the multi-faceted talents of Pablo Ziegler. For over a decade Ziegler was pianist and arranger for Ástor Piazzolla's New Tango Quintet. Indeed Ziegler was the instrumental voice that brought Piazzolla's reinvention of the Argentinean tango to life. Ziegler is one of the world's foremost experts on Spanish and Latin American music. A respected musicologist, he has written numerous articles for major periodicals and magazines on the diverse strains of Latin pop and classicism. Above all Ziegler is a formidable keyboard technician who can spin virtuosic flourishes and hold his own with the likes of Emanuel Ax and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. (He has made distinguished recordings with those artists.)

For all his harmonic astringency and New Age creative touch, Piazzolla had a tendency to be repetitive. His best compositions (ie *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*, *Libertango*, *Tangazo*) are bracing, rhythmically pungent concert pieces, light years away from the dance floor. Many of his other works, however, are carbon copies that can wear thin; a little Piazzolla goes a long way. Ziegler's original scores, on the other hand, are the output of a Latin Renaissance artist. His synthesis of tango, jazz, classicism and Afro-Cuban elements is wonderfully eclectic; the work of an original creative voice. This composer's scores can traverse angular rhythms or finger snapping syncopation or languidly romantic melodies. Alternately performing works by Piazzolla and himself, Ziegler vividly illustrated the difference between his mentor's cinema tinged themes and his own inspired recreation of Latin musical traditions, spiced with 21st century modernity.

Ziegler gave a dizzying demonstration of pianistic bravura, joined by a first rate group of collaborative musicians. Misha Dacic, a keyboard firebrand, was an inspired collaborator in two piano duets, particularly Ziegler's *Maria Ciudad* and *Elegante Canyenguito* -- suave pieces that mix brio with riveting harmonies. Dacic and Ziegler's two pianos glistened in robust, energetic rhythms. Violinist Alexis Cardenas brought rich, sweetly ruminative tone to Ziegler's *Muchacha de Boedo* and *Places* and jazzy pizzazz (à la Stephane Grappelli) to Piazzolla's quintessential *Libertango*. Ziegler's stellar quintet is deeply steeped in this music. Hector del Curto's bandoneon (although over-amplified) rang true to the soul of the Argentine muse. Jisso Ok's cello provided firm support and occasional melodies rich in tonal warmth. Pedro Giraudo was the hard working, first class bass player. For his final set, Ziegler welcomed a group of excellent South Florida musicians. Violinist Misha Vitenson and violist Michael Klotz (from the Amernet String Quartet), along with Cardenas, brought lush, sonorous colors to haunting melodic lines. Dynamic flutist Nicolas Real shined in agile, brilliantly vociferous solo opportunities. With Brian Potts providing rhythmic impetus on percussion, clarinetist Alejandro Lozada and bassoonist Janet Harris were strong in supporting roles.

Ziegler concluded the evening with *Fuga y Misterio* from Piazzolla's opera *Maria de Buenos Aires*. This piece finds the composer at his most dauntingly complex, recalling his study with the rigorous, demanding Nadia Boulanger. Ziegler's exciting pianism capped a celebratory evening of music of the Americas and festive conclusion to 12th annual Miami International Piano Festival.