

Diemecke Shines with Mendelssohn, Strauss, and Two World Premieres: A Memorable Evening

With one hand on his heart and the other on his lips, sending a kiss into the air, conductor Enrique Arturo Diemecke bids farewell to the audience amidst thunderous applause and shouts of "Bravo!" as he slowly exits the stage of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, leaving behind the memory of a memorable evening. He appears smiling, satisfied, and sweaty. The concert has been a demanding, exhausting, and emotional two hours. "A great achievement," he defined it moments before, presenting the final piece of the program, to highlight the two world premieres he had just performed with the National Symphony Orchestra (OSN).

Diemecke returned to the country's premier cultural venue on Friday evening, a place he called home for 20 years – four as artistic director of the Palacio de Bellas Artes Opera and 16 as music director of the OSN – to reunite with the orchestra, now as a guest conductor, and its audience, which nearly filled the venue. The program, titled "Tradition and Modernity," is part of the orchestra's first season of the year and features four works that embody this concept. The program will be repeated today at 12:15 pm. The pieces include Felix Mendelssohn's "Ruy Blas" overture, Richard Strauss's "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks," and the world premieres of Enrico Chapela's "Tetracrómatas" concerto for flute and orchestra, and Alejandro Hernández Cadengo's "Dr. Clown."

The concert opens with Mendelssohn's piece, a solemn, powerful, and brilliant work. Diemecke conducts from memory, without a score, as he will later do with Strauss's piece. He doesn't need a baton to deliver an energetic and electrifying performance, faithful to his striking style. It's a choreography in which music becomes a malleable material that the artist from Guanajuato molds with his hands and the rest of his body, accompanying the sound prodigy with synchronized movements that suddenly become dizzying. A jump on the podium, then another higher one, leg flexions until he's almost sitting, swaying, Diemecke seems to play a huge instrument while whispering the notes. His thumb and index finger suddenly come together as if trying to catch a piece of time or pinch a sound. Zap! He extends his arms, Christ-like, and silence falls; these are fractions of a second that seem eternal. He raises his right arm to its zenith and, like a sharp knife, brings it down violently, tearing through the air, to conclude the piece. The audience erupts into ovations. Something similar happens with Strauss's work. And that's because Diemecke's way of feeling, understanding, and sharing music is a tribute to it and a vital celebration in which the mystery of sound is inhabited, exercised, and transpired.

For the premieres, the conductor uses scores. His performance is more subdued, almost statuesque, with a focused expression, as are the musicians of the OSN, who demonstrate good temperament and balanced, diaphanous sound. Chapela's "Tetracrómatas" concerto for flute and orchestra features flautist Evangelina Reyes as the soloist, who uses four different flutes throughout the three movements: soprano, bass, alto, and piccolo, which require electronic amplification to avoid being overshadowed by the orchestral sound.

It's a contrasting work that, in 25 minutes, transitions from the magical to the epic, with languid passages in which the flute sings with a deep, melancholic voice, but not a sorrowful one. Hernández Cadengo's "Dr. Clown" is a cheerful and festive work, very scenic, as it begins with the musicians covered with umbrellas and concludes with them standing and spinning around their axis. In its 10 minutes, the music evokes laughter, chuckles; suddenly it's a waltz, then a march, with several sweet and hopeful moments.

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