

WASHINGTON TIMES STAFF

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Premiere of Bolivar tribute at Festival

The 25th Inter-American Music Festival concert at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall on Friday included the world premiere of a highly impressive tribute to Simon Bolivar honoring his bicentennial year: "Padre Libertador" for Chorus and Orchestra, by the Argentinian-Venezuelan composer Isabel Aretz (b. 1913-).

Born in and educated in Argentina, Aretz has spent the second half of her life in Caracas, and is perhaps the most renowned ethnomusicologist and folklorist among Latin American composers. The text of "Padre Libertador" is drawn from the prose and poetry of several Latin American authors of the 19th and 20th centuries extolling Bolivar.

The music is an extraordinary amalgam of folkloric elements with atonal, serial, aleatoric and electronic techniques. Its rhythmic complexities and polytonal differences in pitch and musical scale between orchestra and singers were negotiated admirably by the remarkable musicians of the Festival orchestra, and the highly professional singers of the Paul Hill Chorale, plus soloists, all conducted smartly

by Paul Hill. For the record, the soloists were soprano Sarah Bloxham, tenor John Rhodes and basso Louis Reichwein.

The rest of this immensely rewarding concert was conducted by Jorge Mester, a regular at these festivals, and probably the most celebrated conductor of American music alive, as well as a tireless champion of new music from all over. He coped with the dense orchestral writing and extraordinary demands of Ginastera's Concerto No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra (1961) in masterly fashion, collaborating superbly with piano soloist Luis Ascot.

Ascot, a prodigious pianist from Argentina currently based in Switzerland, played this finger-busting concerto with breathtaking brilliance. One is not likely to hear the final movement, Toccata concertata, played with cleaner articulation or more relentless drive.

The program opened and closed with works by U.S. composers, Bergsma's Serenade to Await the Moon (1965), and Mennin's Symphony No. 9 "Sinfonia capricciosa" (1981).

Written for the National Symphony Orchestra's 50th season, Mennin's Symphony is a highly charged work with rhythmic complexities and lavish use of brass and percussion. It is often melodic, with extended development of thematic material, often in a series of immense chords. Mester led a stirring performance that brought a substantial number of the large audience to their feet to cheer composer and players, and Mester was given a spontaneous ovation by the orchestra.

— F. Warren O'Reilly

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