

Review: Symphony delivers picturesque view of South America

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FARGO – For its new season, the Fargo-Moorhead Symphony Orchestra is taking guests on a musical tour around the world. If Saturday's season opener is any indication, it's a trip you won't want to miss.

The program, with a second performance this afternoon, gave ticket-holders a brief but memorable visit to Chile and Argentina.

Music from the countries is rare in the FMSO's history, just as having a guitar-based pair, Alturas Duo, as the guest soloists. (It's been over a decade since another six-stringed picker took center stage with the FMSO.)

"Viva South America!" showcases works by two 20th century composers. While the pieces have roots in the traditional European world of classic music, they paint vivid, lively pictures of Chile and Argentina.

Guitarists Scott Hill and Carlos Boltez and guest flautist Gonzalo Cortes even showed visible color, forgoing the traditional symphony black tuxedo for vibrant, embroidered South American vests.

The real flashiness was in their playing, as they brought depth and emotion to Horacio Salinas' "Danzas Peregrinas" ("Dances of the Pilgrims"). Boltez switched between playing rhythmic flourishes and lead on the charango – a small, 10-string guitar – and viola, with Cortes breathing life into the quena (a wooden, six-holed flute that allows notes to bend in a wonderfully expressive way) two zampoñas – or pan flutes – and a Western concert flute.

Salinas was exiled from his native Chile by dictator Augusto Pinochet in 1973 and "Danzas Peregrinas" conveys the composer's love for his homeland as well as undertones of the dark political atmosphere at the time. The 25-minute composition bubbles up from hushed string plucking behind Hill's guitar in the second movement, "Piu allegro," to hints of a parade in the fourth movement, "El Mercado."

The music was even more festive and the orchestra more animated in the concert's opener, Alberto Ginastera's "Dances from the Ballet Estancia."

It opens with a dynamic, rolling movement before giving way to the pastoral "Danza del trigo" with concertmaster/violinist Ben Sung offering a beautifully emotive passage.

The third movement is majestic with the horns portraying the gauchos, but things quiet down again in the final movement, "Danza final (Malambo)," with the strings stirring like a rippling creek which soon turns into a raging river. The piano bangs away and the violins and violas stomp to the dance of the Argentine cowboys.

After an intermission, the show closed with William Walton's "Symphony No. 1," the first movement of which was offered as a teaser during last season's fall finale.

The South American aspects of the show were a bit of a departure from the typical symphony fair, but like travel itself, sometimes the most beautiful spots are off the beaten path.