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Music Director Robert Spano's and Artistic Director Thomas Morris's main idea for the 2006 Ojai Festival. music of Osvaldo Golijov, planted itself right in the middle of what's hip and happening in contemporary and world music. Indeed, in two of the five programs that I caught, and most of a third, the performers were basically playing their latest recordings. An *Ayre*-Berio concert came out on a single Deutsche Grammophon CD last fall. *Ainadamar* was released by DG a month before the festival. and the Atlanta Symphony Chamber Chorus's program was taken intact from its latest Telarc disc – all for sale, of course. on the festival grounds. This is a tactic long used in the pop music world, and one wonders why it took so long to catch on in the classical arena.

Lest you think that Ojai is capitulating to commercial concerns, this California town (population 8,200) still tries its best to defy the big, bad outside world. Though land values and motel room rates continue to skyrocket. the town remains defiantly free of fast-food franchises and other chains. Bart's Books, a unique, lovable, mostly outdoor treasure chest of literature, still thrives on the corner of Canada and Matilija Streets. There are more loudspeakers than ever in the oak-and-sycamore shaded village park where the concerts take place, yet the sound is usually very good, accompanied by endearing non-amplified obbligatos from resident birds and crickets. And take note, iconoclasts: the Mozart Madness that swamped the festival world in his 250th year was nowhere to be found in Ojai, nor was there any Shostakovich centennial business within earshot.

In any case, Golijov's name was potent enough to pack Libbey Park's hard wooden benches in three of the five programs – and deservedly so, for his best qualities were on display, and the performers were passionately committed to them. Expanding from his somewhat confining Argentine Jewish base. Golijov now embraces the whole sphere of world music with a huge bear hug, tapping sincerely into its vitality and performance techniques, while pulling along the core classical avant-garde audience with him. He generously and diplomatically shares credit when he needs help in assimilating some of the genres he borrows from, he isn't afraid to admit mistakes, and he doesn't hesitate to use technology. I can't say that I hear an individual compositional signature yet, but it is fair to call him a master mixer of his time.

In his most extensive and productive mea culpa, Golijov has turned his troubled first "opera", *Ainadamar*, into a viable, exciting, unified piece of music. In a post-concert talk on Friday June 9, Golijov admitted that he now thinks the first version (which I heard in Los Angeles in February 2004 with a few revisions) was a "bad piece". So he deleted about 20 minutes of music

and added 40 new minutes, which means this now 80-minute work is a radically different organism.

The role of Federico Garcia Lorca, the martyred Spanish playwright, was given a bigger part in the story line, and the lead diva role of Margarita Xirgu (Dawn Upshaw) now has a student, Nuria (Jessica Rivera), who touches off the memories. The best parts of the score – the Andalusian-drenched fanfares and grooves – have been retained and expanded. and now there is a catchy guaracha-like Cuban episode (with music by Gonzalo Grau) where Lorca is enticed to flee to Havana but remains in Spain. More than ever, the shadow of the great Miles Davis-Gil Evans fusion of classical, jazz, and Andalusian music, *Sketches of Spain*, falls over this piece – an influence that Golijov acknowledges and was felt elsewhere in this festival.

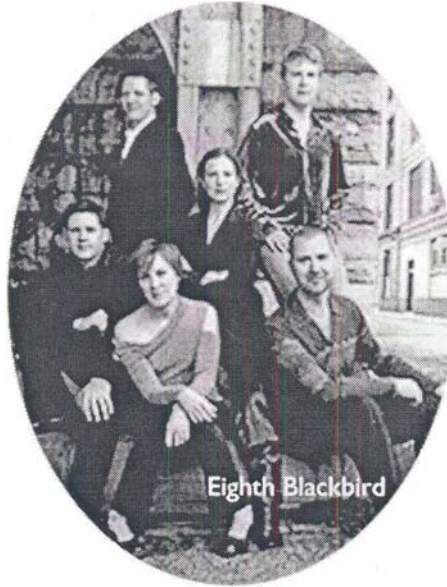
The performance made a fervent case for the revision: Upshaw soaring over the rhythms, not as overwrought as on the recording; fellow original cast member Kelley O'Connor (Lorca) making a fine foil for Upshaw with her unique, chesty, alto timbre; Spano comfortably conveying the swing of the full advantage of the relaying the bubbling water radio speeches around the voices could be heard concert performance, the staging: the music was component and is even more

On Sunday morning chamber music ensemble, performance of Golijov's song cycle *Ayre*, that sizzled surpassed the terrific now stretches all around the the burst of electronica in the a Muru', with Upshaw in to a thrilling racket. the single most electrifying moment in the festival. Some may have feared for the safety of Upshaw's vocal cords at that point, but her next entrance found her once again in luminous voice. With the drawn-out. gently swaying Afro-Cuban and Middle Eastern groove at the close, again *Sketches of Spain* cast its spell.

The couplings for these two concerts made perfect sense. For *Ainadamar*, the prologue was a new arrangement of Frederic Rzewski's minimalist rabble-rouser *Coming Together*, where the words of a doomed Attica State prisoner are passed around to various voices in the ensemble instead of being confined to a single speaker. This idea gives the piece an appealing communal spirit, one that Eighth Blackbird entered uninhibitedly. Berio's *Folk Songs* was the obvious partner for *Ayre*, and Upshaw used parts of it to convey hints of her new deliberately harsher timbres to come.

On Saturday morning, the ASO Chamber Chorus sang its recording, a mellow selection of music by Messiaen, Tallis, Vaughan Williams, Tavener, Duruflé, and very early Copland. There was no doubt that this smooth, flexible, passionate choir, polished to a high gloss by Robert Shaw and maintained that way by conductor Norman Mackenzie, remains one of the best in the world. Messiaen's heartfelt 'O Sacrum Convivium!' alone was worth the trek to Ojai.

The Saturday night concert was a showcase for the versatility of singer Luciana Souza, who began the evening with free improvisations on Brazilian popular songs, mostly by Antonio Carlos Jobim, and closed it as the soloist in Falla's *Amor Brujo* with Spano and the ASO. While



her lovely, flexible voice fit like a glove with Romero Lubambo's acoustic guitar in Jobim, her pop timbre seemed a little odd in Falla, though her diction was far better than that of most conventional operatically trained voices.

Souza also figured in the third Golijov festival entry Sunday afternoon: *Oceana*, a 1996 cantata that predates his spectacular rise, yet predicts many of the global-music strategies that turned up in his music later. The opening – an acoustic guitar, taped ocean waves, and a low-pitched vocal by Souza – immediately sucked the listener in, as Souza performed a tuneful, scatted vocalise over a syncopated rhythm from the guitar and bass. While *Oceana* runs a bit short on fuel in its long, diffuse choral finale, its best parts are well worth hearing again – as we will, for Spano and the ASO have recorded this, too, for future release on DG.

Choosing interconnected concert mates for *Oceana*, Spano started with John Adams's madcap merger of Schoenberg and Looney Tunes, the Chamber Symphony, allowing it to drift without much forward thrust. Then he entered the hanging, twilight dream world of Berio's *Requies*, merging quietly into Adams's arrangement of Busoni's lyrical, thought-provoking meditation, *Berceuse Élégiacque*.

Spano wrapped up the concert – and the festival – with Berio's transcription of the unfinished Contrapunctus XIX from Bach's *Art of Fugue*, which led into the 'Dona Nobis Pacem' coda to the B-minor Mass. In doing so, Spano was paying unbilled tribute to one of Ojai's most enterprising artistic directors, William Malloch, whose name was inexplicably missing from all of the printed and spoken homages to the festival's 60th Anniversary this year. Malloch had made his own highly fanciful arrangement of Bach, *The Art of Fuguing* (it was performed here in 1980), and, though it would have been better to have heard his "unfinish" of Contrapunctus XIX (it's far more imaginative than Berio's), this was a touching tribute anyway.