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Thunderous close to Miami Symphony season

BY LAWRENCE A. JOHNSON

Eduardo Marturet and the Miami Symphony Orchestra could hardly have asked for a more dramatic finish to their season. The roaring storm that rocked Miami Beach Sunday night bestowed a counterpoint of thunder and pounding rain on the Lincoln Theatre roof, adding further excitement to the Rachmaninoff performance taking place on stage.

Vanessa Perez was the evening's soloist in the Russian composer's not unfamiliar Piano Concerto No. 2. The young Hialeah native has won prizes at several competitions and brought enviable youthful fire to Rachmaninoff's keyboard warhorse. At times in the heat of the moment, Perez's playing turned clattery, and she tended to rush, once or twice becoming separated from Marturet and the orchestra.

Still, the Adagio had a wonderful rapt lyricism, Perez floating the main theme with poetic elegance enhanced by the dark, burnished MSO strings. Marturet and the orchestra provided well-upholstered accompaniment for Perez's high-adrenaline solo work, and the sumptuous climax of the finale made a grand and thrilling impact.

The marked improvement in the quality of the Miami Symphony Orchestra since Marturet has taken the helm is truly impressive. Ensemble playing is still not completely airtight, with some untidy moments and errant wind tuning. But the violins have evolved into a gleaming and virtuosic section, and even with his moments of frenzied theatricality, the conductor brings a welcome fervor and intensity to the music-making.

The program book indicated we might be in for a musicological revelation, promising a performance of Brahms' "Symphony No. 98," but, in fact, the work was the Fourth Symphony in E minor.

The gaunt, grim drama of Brahms' final symphony was firmly conveyed in the opening movement with an implacable forward momentum and gutsy, incisive attacks. The Adagio began in offhand fashion, lacking in concentration, though Marturet and the strings soon brought greater focus to this most deeply felt of Brahms' symphonic slow movements. Marturet's direction of the closing Passacaglia felt fussy and over-detailed, yet he built the music inexorably to a grimly defiant conclusion.

The evening began with the lighter fare of Ambroise Thomas' overture to his opera *Mignon*. A repertoire staple in the early part of the 20th century, Thomas' opera has long since been shot out of the canon, possibly unfairly. Thomas' opera is chock full of lilting melodies and snappy orchestration, certainly enough to warrant occasional exhumation.

Marturet led a buoyant performance, short on French elegance but rousing and enjoyable. The rendition was partially marred by the ringing cell phone of a woman who had just checked her purse to ensure she had left her phone at home only to discover otherwise. I know this because she was my date.

Lawrence A. Johnson is classical music critic of The Miami Herald.

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