

# Simply stunning symphony

By Betty Ligon 11/30/2008 . El Paso Inc Writer | Posted: Monday, December 1, 2008 11:51 am

When I was a kid, the first symphony I recall hearing on my grandmother's chest-high Victrola was Mendelssohn's Fourth, the "Italian Symphony."

It's been one of my favorites ever since. So it was a treat to have it included on El Paso Symphony Orchestra's subscription series last week.

EPSO's Maestra Sarah Ioannides and her attentive batch of musicians did it up proud in my estimation.

From the exuberant opening by joyous violins accompanied by blazing horns and woodwinds, you knew you were in for a stunning experience. The woods held up well throughout.

In the more moving melancholic second movement, flutes and violins embellished a duo background to the melody followed by the virile clarinet.

The third movement contributed a sprightly and vigorous palette of colors from all sections, particularly the brass.

It was in the final movement that Ioannides whipped the musicians into a whirlwind of rhythms for the Saltarello, a carnival dance full of jumps and leaps.

Violins displayed fine playing along with the flutes until they worked into a lather and adopted the rhythms of a tarantella. This I discovered in research about dances!

One of Ioannides' talents for designing concert programs is that of including unknown or less frequently performed works to help educate her faithful followers as well as young people.

William Walton is no Johnny-come-lately on the musical stage. The respected British composer (1902-1983) made a name for himself for bringing solo viola literature to the forefront.

The concert's guest artist was violist Roberto Diaz, playing the Walton Viola Concerto. It has never been programmed on an EPSO concert series as far as anyone knows.

Ioannides tapped one of the finest, according to what I could discover, viola artists in the country, if not in the world. Easy to believe after listening to him. His day job is president/CEO of Curtis Institute of Music.

In the pre-concert talk with Ioannides and cellist Ben Vickers, Diaz described the Walton, saying, "I love this piece!"

He pointed out that the first of three movements begins with a slower tempo than usual. Deep, dark romantic expressions poured out of the viola like melting chocolate.

The brilliant second movement lit up a light and jazzy change of pace as all orchestra sections sprang to life.

One musicologist wrote that this is "a virtuoso piece that no one but a well-trained professional could hope to handle." Diaz tossed it off with panache to spare, sensitively accompanied by the orchestra.

The coda took on the melancholy of the soaring solo lines in the first movement and the orchestra repeated its melodic themes in the finale. Clarinets and cellos accompanied the viola as the movement died away.

With a quiet ending the audience responded with warm extended applause, enough to coax Diaz into a frenzied encore, a movement from a Hindemith Sonata.

Haydn got his licks in as well with a bright and bouncy program opener, "Overture to La Fedelta Premiata."

I must express gratitude and make note of the absence of intruding applause at the end of every movement, generated in past by kids in the freebie balcony and adults who didn't know better. EPSO general manager Ruth Ellen Jacobson said she spoke to them before the concert this time and instructed them about expected concert etiquette.

### **Artyfacts**

Time to catch up on spellbinding art exhibitions going on around town. First on the list is one I attended more than two weeks ago at the Chamizal National Memorial called "Classical Impressionists of El Paso" with six painters. All of them have studied with Russian Impressionist Aleksander Titovets.

They all had a common subject, national parks of the Southwest, which includes Chamizal. The parks are in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California and Colorado. The artists are Lynne Welch, Carmen Rodriguez, David Fickett, Nina Cobb Walker, Neil Gunn and Richelle Moore.

We've followed Fickett's art output since he began studying with Titovets. His grasp of the oil medium and rapid improvement is truly remarkable.

All of the artists created beautiful paintings. Any of them I would be proud to hang in my home. Because of the medium and subject, they look much alike. But careful examination will reveal subtle differences.

The 40 pieces in the show will be up until Jan. 17. It really is a must see.

The other big show on display through Jan. 30 is "Little Women" at Hal Marcus Studio and Gallery, 800 N. Mesa. The 17 women artists aren't little.

They were told to paint women in miniatures no bigger than 12 x 12 inches. It was fun to see how they had to use a style different from the one they are known for. Like abstract painter Pat Olchefski-Winston's four female faces copied off a photo!

Betty Ligon has moved to 221 Montego Bay Dr., 79912. She can be reached by e-mail at [bettyligon@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bettyligon@sbcglobal.net).