

The New York Times

February 6, 2006

Classical Music Review | 'The Passion of Osvaldo Golijov' Skipping Across the Globe and Through Time

By ALLAN KOZINN

Osvaldo Golijov's music makes a powerful case for wandering. Having spent stretches of his life in Argentina and Israel before coming to the United States, he has soaked up the music and poetry of several cultures - ancient, modern, popular, traditional, formal and improvised - and given them equal weight in his creative psyche. Composing, for him, seems to be a matter of resequencing the DNA of these styles, balancing their influences differently in each of his works. His pieces may tilt toward his Latin or Jewish roots, or toward influences from other, less predictable directions. Increasingly, they draw on several of these flavors at once, but the *mélange* they yield is identifiably Mr. Golijov's.

The two installments on Saturday evening of Lincoln Center's celebration of this composer's work, "The Passion of Osvaldo Golijov," put the spotlight clearly on Mr. Golijov's influences. In the first half of the early show, in the Rose Theater, the Kronos Quartet roared through 10 short works Mr. Golijov arranged, as well as a few original scores, and collaborations.

It was tempting to focus on the originals, the most striking of which was a slow-moving, eerily beautiful elegy, "Darkness 9/11" (2002), composed with Gustavo Santaolalla. Another, "Last Andalusian Sky" (2005), begins with a quiet cello ostinato and blossoms quickly into a complex, almost orchestral fabric (although the illusion of orchestral heft may be a product of the Kronos's amplification). A rhythmically pointed "Doina" (2000) reconfigures a Romanian dance form now heard most frequently in klezmer, and "K'in Sventa Ch'ul Me'tik Kwadulupe" (2001) is a ruminative fantasy woven around the recorded sounds of a religious ritual from southern Mexico.

But the arrangements are telling as well. Mr. Golijov's hard-edged, brash version of Severiano Briseño's "Sinaloense," in a tightly wound reading by the Kronos, opened the concert with a burst of energy, and was immediately offset by a gentle rendering of Rezso Seress's "Gloomy Sunday." Another antique pop setting, Carlos Paredes's "Canção Verdes Anos," was graceful, if slightly pale. Also included was a peculiar reduction of Stravinsky's "Circus Polka" that casts Stravinsky as an unwilling Viennese Romantic.

After the intermission, Dawn Upshaw and the Andalucian Dogs performed "Ayre" (2004), a magnificent song cycle that has one foot in Renaissance Spain, where Jewish, Muslim and Roman Catholic cultures mingled, and the other in the messier modern world. Its texts and some of its melodies are based on Sephardic and Arabic folk songs, along with 12th-century liturgical poetry of Yehuda Halevi and a modern poem by Mahmoud Darwish, juxtaposed in a sweeping, often deeply moving sequence.

Ms. Upshaw, who also sang the work in 2004 at Zankel Hall, threw herself into it completely, drawing on a broad range of vocal color and singing its melismatic lines with an evocatively Mediterranean lilt.

Two movements of "Ayre" were composed by Mr. Santaolalla, who played guitar and ronroco in the accompanying ensemble and appeared in the later concert as well, a set of classic tangos in the Allen Room by the 26-year-old singer Cristóbal Repetto.

The next installment of the "Passion of Osvaldo Golijov" series is a Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center concert with the St. Lawrence String Quartet, the clarinetist Todd Palmer and the cellist David Finckel at Alice Tully Hall on Wednesday.