

*Spanish songs by Lyric Fest (2nd review)***What musicians can learn from politicians**

Steve Cohen

November 20, 2012 in *Music & Opera**Aleida: Dreams from exile.*

Politicians are discovering that America's population is becoming increasingly Hispanic. Opera companies seem slower. At the Metropolitan, for example, productions have been sung in Chinese (Tan Dunn's *The First Emperor*), Sanskrit (Philip Glass's *Satyagraha*) and Latin (Igor Stravinsky's *Oedipus*), but nothing lately in Spanish.

If anything, Philadelphia has been ahead of the curve, with Spanish-language productions of Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* and Daniel Catán's *Il Postino*.

Lyric Fest's recent Spanish concert revealed some of the rich repertoire that's available. It ranged from Moorish roots through Hebraic-heritage Ladino song to music of the Latin-American cultures enslaved by the Spaniards, to

Cuban and Mexican ballads and arias from the Iberian Peninsula. The baritone Luis Ledesma summed up the spirit of the program when he told the audience, "This is our culture; this is our language."

Jews, Muslims and heretics

This eclectic mix of disparate cultures produced a surprisingly large diversity of styles. After the Moors invaded the Iberian Peninsula in 711, Middle-Eastern Muslim influences affected Spanish architecture, language and modes of dress for the next eight centuries, as exemplified in tenor Diego Silva's plaintive singing of *El Pano Moruno* ("The Moorish Cloth").

The decade of Columbus's voyages to the New World also saw Jews and Muslims banished from Spain and heretics burned at the stake, and soprano Maria Aleida beautifully captured that mood with the sad *Con quella lavare?* ("With what shall I wash the skin of my face?").

Juan de Anchieta, the court composer for Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, wrote *Con amores, la mi madre* ("With love, my mother"), which Ledesma vocalized affectionately.

Empty ports

When the Spaniards arrived in Argentina, they conquered primitive farmers and hunter-gatherers. That indigenous culture inspired more than 100 songs by Carlos Guastivina, including *Pampamapa*, a paean to the land that was powerfully belted by Ledesma.

After the Conquistadores colonized Colombia, Panama and Ecuador, the Colombian musician and historian Hans Federico Neuman evoked the original civilizations in *Rumbo Estelar* ("Starry Way"), about the solitude of empty ports, which mezzo Carla Dirlikov sang with appropriate moodiness. Aleida then dreamed of the far-away Pampas in Lecuona's *Cancion del amore triste* ("Song of Sad Love").

Aztecs and Mayans were subjugated by Europeans, too, but the Mexican composer Manuel Ponce evoked their spirit with *Estrellita* ("Little Star"), a romantic ballad that Silva crooned in the style of Mario Lanza.

Black slave in Cuba

The afternoon's most colorful performances were *Cuba dentro*, Ledesma's world-weary evocation of fandangos and a parrot at the piano in old Cuba, and *Canto Negro*, a ballad of a black slave in Cuba, smokily chanted by Dirlikov, a dramatic mezzo whose mother, incidentally, is Mexican.

The most unusual was the brief Sephardic *Yo boli de foja en foja* ("I flew from leaf to leaf"), sung tenderly by Silva. And the most spectacular was Aleida's *Escucha al Ruisenor* ("Listen to the Nightingale"), which

included dazzling high coloratura leaps.♦

To read another review by Tom Purdom, click [here](#).



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ARTICLE OVERVIEW

Four artists from the Academy of Vocal Arts sang an all-Spanish program. Given all the talk about America's growing Latin population, it's about time.

WHAT, WHEN, WHERE

Lyric Fest: "A Tu Corazon, To Your Heart." Songs from Spain and Latin America by Falla, Piazzolla et al. Maria Aleida, soprano; Carla Dirlikov, mezzo-soprano; Diego Silva, tenor; Luis Ledesma, baritone; Laura Ward, piano. Suzanne DuPlantis, Randi Marrasso, Laura Ward, artistic directors. November 18, 2012 at Academy of Vocal Arts, 1920 Spruce St. [\(215\) 438-1702](tel:2154381702) or www.lyricfest.org.

ABOUT STEVE COHEN



Steve Cohen studied music, theater and communications and has been a critic and columnist for several national and local publications.