



Wild Rhythms

By Brian Lauritzen

Just because he was born in Mexico City, it would be unfair to pigeon-hole Jorge Federico Osorio as just a specialist in Mexican piano music. He certainly is that but also so much more. Osorio is a self-described Brahms nut, a frequent collaborator on the chamber music scene, a celebrated recording artist, and a passionate advocate for music education who performs regularly for young people's concerts.

And, yes, he dearly loves the piano music of his homeland and plays it as often as he can. He says it gives him great pride to play music of Mexico on his concerts. He says he also likes to highlight the difference between the piano music of Mexico and Spain.

"I think Spanish and Mexican music are very, very contrasting, very different," he said in an interview with radio journalist Bruce Duffie. "Of course there's affinity because of the culture where everything has been happening in the last five hundred years! Certain composers were very much influenced by Spanish composers and music. At one time we had so many Spanish intellectuals coming to Mexico; at that time in Mexico, it was a strong influence on so many people in so many areas."

The difference, Osorio says, is in the musical source material.

"Mexican music has really gone back and tried to find the roots in pre-Colombian music. The rhythms and all that are much more wild. It's much more raw, the Mexican type of music. Raw from the guts. On the other hand, I was thinking about

Spanish music and they also have this gutsy feeling. There's some places in the pieces I play that are so dramatic, and also the drive of the rhythm is tremendous! So I guess there are similarities. In this world, in this language of international music, you always find something. That's why we all are here, and try to communicate that through music, because in a way, we can all understand through music."

Jorge Federico Osorio has brought music by two Mexican composers for his performance on January 16. Manuel Ponce, who is one of Mexico's most famous composers, brought a mostly forgotten tradition of popular song and Mexican musical folklore into the concert hall. Ricardo Castro, a concert pianist, was one of the earliest classical artists and composers to tour the world and share the music of Mexico with audiences in Europe and elsewhere.

There's certainly a European influence in Castro's *Barcarola*, a lilting song reminiscent of the Venetian gondoliers. You'll hear the influence of Franz Liszt in this music, but all filtered through Castro's thoroughly original compositional voice.

If you hear echoes of Debussy or French impressionism in Ponce's *Balada Mexicana*, you wouldn't need to get your ears checked. Ponce spent eight years living in Paris (where he studied with Debussy's teacher, Paul Dukas) and when he returned to Mexico, he was a huge champion of Debussy's music, requiring his own students to learn and perform it on their concerts and recitals.

Debussy makes an appearance on Jorge Federico Osorio's program. His *Préludes*—most of which have evocative titles like *The Submerged (Sunken) Cathedral*, *The Wind in the Plain*, or *Canopic Jar* (yes, as in what the ancient Egyptians stored the body's organs in during the mummification process)—were written between 1909 and 1913, so right at the same time as Ponce was living in Paris.

It's difficult to wrap one's mind around the concept that anything created by a 31-year-old is "late work." But tragically, Franz Schubert died at that tender age. The music he produced in his final years shows a depth beyond his years. Age, as they say, is just a number.

When Jorge Federico Osorio plays Schubert's penultimate piano sonata, we get a glimpse of the man behind the music.

Schubert was ridiculously prolific. In a compositional life that was basically only two decades, he wrote more than 1,500 works. This includes more than 600 lieder (songs), nearly as many pieces for solo piano, 20 stage works (operas, incidental music, etc.), more than 20 string quartets (also quintets, trios, and duos), a dozen symphonies of which seven were completed (turns out *The Unfinished Symphony* is just an unfinished symphony), and some 40 liturgical works, including several masses.

Schubert was also radically depressed. (Understandably so, for a young man diagnosed with syphilis before he even turned 30.) In a letter to a close friend he wrote, "I feel myself to be the most unfortunate, the most miserable being in the world. Think of a man whose health will never be right again, and who from despair over the fact makes it worse instead of better; think of a man, I say, whose splendid hopes have come to naught, to whom the happiness of love and friendship offers nothing but acutest pain, whose enthusiasm (at least, the inspiring kind) for the Beautiful threatens to disappear, and ask yourself whether he isn't a miserable, unfortunate fellow. My peace is gone, my heart is heavy, I find it never, nevermore...so might I sing every day, since each night when I go to sleep I hope never again to wake, and each morning merely reminds me of the misery of yesterday."

If you've ever battled depression, or know someone who has, you know that's precisely what it feels like. There is no hope. And yet, Schubert's music from the end of his life is not an endless stream of woeful laments. In fact, his late music searches for peace, comfort, and meaning among the darkness. Perhaps, this search brought Schubert some manner of consolation.

Two Chorale Preludes by Bach and a lesser-known work by Franz Liszt—based on literary themes which ask the questions "What do I want? Who am I? What do I ask of nature?"—round out Jorge Federico Osorio's program.

Join Brian Lauritzen and other guest moderators for free pre-concert conversations in the Bram Goldsmith Theater with the artists prior to select classical music performances, along with a complimentary glass of wine provided by The Henry Wine Group.