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Posted on Sun, Sep. 30, 2007

[email](#) [print](#) [reprint](#) [AIM](#) [del.icio.us](#) [Digg](#)BY LAWRENCE A. JOHNSON  
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Eduardo Marturet's podium style can best be described as something between hyperkinetic Pilates and a grand mal seizure. He conducts the Miami Symphony Orchestra with rapid, violent movements and broad arm sweeps that often provide inadvertent metal percussion when he loudly clangs his baton against the principals' music stands. Last season his uninhibited Terpsichorean direction more than once knocked stands over and sent scores flying, leaving his players to scramble for their music.

Yet, while occasionally over the top, Marturet's Bernsteinian calisthenics usually elicit worthy musical results. In just two years, the Venezuelan conductor has raised the performances of the perennially mediocre Miami Symphony Orchestra to a higher level and much more consistent standard. Further, he has imbued the playing with a passion and urgency that was distinctly lacking during the final years under the MSO's ailing founder, Manuel Ochoa.



Eduardo Marturet conducting the Miami Symphony Orchestra.

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## IF YOU GO

**What:** Season-opening Miami Symphony Orchestra concert with conductor Eduardo Marturet and guest violinist Lara St. John in a program featuring Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, Piazzolla's *The Four Seasons* and Smetana's *Die Moldau*.

**When:** 8 p.m. Friday

**Where:** The John S. and James L. Knight Concert Hall at the Carnival Center for the Performing Arts, 1300 Biscayne Blvd., Miami

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"We're playing better," says flutist Carol Naveira-Nicholson, an MSO member since the first season in 1989. "I think we work well with him." She notes that many orchestras adopt an adversarial stance with their music directors but says that's not the case with Marturet. "We have a positive relationship with him. He talks to us and actually listens to us."

"It's been a joy working with Eduardo," says principal trumpet Jean-Claude Misset. "He has infused new blood and energy. . . . I think the public has responded and is now coming out to more concerts."

Marturet and the orchestra will open their season Friday with a gala concert at the Carnival Center's Knight Concert Hall, playing Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, Smetana's *Die Moldau* and Piazzolla's *The Four Seasons* featuring guest violinist Lara St. John.

In contrast to his frenetic podium manner, the conductor is subdued and thoughtful in conversation yet refreshingly candid about the Miami Symphony and the mutable South Florida music scene.

"We still have a long way to go," the 54-year-old Marturet says. "But we really want to grow and become Miami's orchestra and fill that hole left by the Florida Philharmonic."

Founded in 1989 by Ochoa, the symphony held an unofficial place for most of its history as the city's "Latin orchestra," with a heavily Hispanic roster and audience. That local pride culminated in the ensemble's tax-funded trip to New York's Carnegie Hall in 2000.

Yet the MSO seemed to exist in a parallel universe to the city's main classical-music scene, disdained by many critics and much of the local cultural establishment as symbol over substance and an also-ran to the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra.

"We still have that stigma a bit, like we were considered ghetto-ized or something," Marturet says from his native Caracas where he resides. "There's been a lot of snobbery about the orchestra in the past, but I think that is changing, and we're headed in the right direction."

Marturet first conducted the ensemble in 2005 when he was named associate principal conductor. He was Ochoa's clear choice as successor, and when the Cuban conductor became ill, he took over for all of that season's concerts.

Marturet says that Ochoa was well aware of the orchestra's strengths and weaknesses and felt that a new, younger hand was needed.

"I was very clear and explained to the board that either the orchestra made a tremendous improvement -- artistically and financially -- or the orchestra was going to disappear. The way the city is growing and the examples we've seen show us that there is no other way but to grow in a quantum leap."

Today's Miami Symphony Orchestra still has a way to go to get all of its sections up to the level Marturet would like. In addition to engaging such guest artists as the Amernet String Quartet as occasional section players, Marturet has made several personnel changes that will be apparent this season to regular MSO subscribers.

"In the beginning I didn't want to touch too much because I thought I had to get used to the orchestra," Marturet says. "An orchestra is made of human beings, and the soul, the musicality of an orchestra comes very much from commitment."

The MSO now boasts an impressive violin section with a gleaming, virtuosic sound. Other sections are more uneven, though Marturet says he is working hard to upgrade the cellos and woodwinds.

After the New World Symphony, the 80-player MSO pretty much has the field to itself as a local, full symphony orchestra with a multi-concert season.

Still, the current competitive environment with new chamber orchestras springing up every year sometimes makes it difficult to obtain the best players for a season that offers only 10 concerts. On the positive side, Marturet sees a dedication from his musicians that is not always a given, especially in South Florida.

"They play music because they love it, and they want to commit themselves to the organization," he says. "It's not a gig at all."

**Tickets:** \$20-\$150

**Info:** 305-275-2666; [www.miamisymphony.org](http://www.miamisymphony.org)

Marturet says he particularly appreciates the collegial spirit of his players. He contrasts the Miami Symphony with the intractability he observed in some musicians of the defunct Florida Philharmonic and believes a problematic attitude contributed to that orchestra's demise.

"It's not a very diplomatic thing to say, and I know there were financial elements too," he says, "but I've come to the conclusion that the reason for the disbandment of the Florida Philharmonic is mostly the Philharmonic musicians. I think that musicians sometimes can really become their worst enemies and make things very complicated."

While he is heartened by the improvement in the Miami Symphony, Marturet says that in terms of quality and a more extensive season the orchestra is only at about 10 percent of where he hopes to take it. Challenges remain the lack of a regular home and rehearsal hall and a fragmented schedule with concerts unevenly scattered among Gusman Concert Hall, the Lincoln Theatre and Knight Concert Hall.

"Part of the problem with an orchestra that meets just once a month is that an orchestra is like a sports team," Marturet says. "You have to practice every day. When you have a month and a half in between concerts it's a killer for us. It's not a lack of talent in some sections but that we don't have the budget to rehearse more often."

Marturet grudgingly revised this season's programs, which are much less adventurous than he had planned, to appeal to a wider audience. He promises next season will offer a better mix with more challenging repertoire.

Word of the improved Miami Symphony appears to be getting around, even as the orchestra deals with increased competition and a miniscule \$1-million budget. More new audience members are coming to its events, and the Concert Association of Florida is in the early stages of discussing future collaborations.

"All these things indicate that we are going in the right direction," Marturet says. "People realize that whenever they go to our concerts they leave the hall feeling energized. . . ."

"We can't make our goal to copy anyone else. The orchestra has to find its own destiny."

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