



Eduardo Marturet: The Philharmonic's Next Guest

By *Cecilia Scalisi* from *Berlin*

For LA NACIÓN

BERLIN | Already known to Argentina following a first visit as a guest of the Philharmonic and before that, as conductor of the Berliner Symphoniker during its first tour in Argentina in 2001, the talented Venezuelan conductor and composer Eduardo Marturet is coming back, this time with two concerts at the Colón, another at the Faculty of Law and a fourth in Mendoza. After having completed a series of concerts and recording sessions with the Berlin orchestra (a varied repertoire of Argentine works), the man who is currently artistic conductor of the "Sinfonietta Caracas" met with LA NACIÓN and spoke of his vision of Latin American symphony orchestras, the challenges they face and their future, an issue that has kept this active musician busy for the past several years and for which he has drawn up an interesting report called: "The challenge of excellence."

"We must understand and be willing to accept that a Latin American orchestra will never sound like a European one. Never!" is how the Venezuelan conductor begins the interview. *"Nevertheless, and even with the differences in artistic level, Latin American orchestras tend to be more involved with the mysticism of professional life, but continue to have a complex that prevents them from defining their own personality."*

Given that Latin America is so large, how applicable is that stereotype?

On the one hand, the matter of discipline... or lack thereof. On the other all of them, to a greater or lesser degree, have a true inferiority complex. They do not accept themselves as they are and that is why they have a hard time being strong bodies, because no conductor's medicine can overcome the lack of self-esteem. What you find in all of us is a tremendous lack of self-esteem, always looking at the neighbor's grass, above all the European grass. We want to be what the others but we only go halfway, without any authenticity.

How would one notice this?

From the very beginning, from the body language. When you look at a major orchestra, the musicians look proud, they sit on the edges of their chairs, they portray energy, light. When an orchestra does not feel pride, that it is a winner, it looks flattened, dispirited. If that is your starting point, the result is obvious. It is like a soccer team: with the champion teams, you can see that every player has the soul of a star, even when he is sitting on the bench.

Musically, what are the core differences?

I wouldn't dare make general statements regarding all of Europe; but I would about the German orchestras: they are the best I know. The core, I would say, lies in a very specific concept of two fundamental elements: *tempo* and tuning.

What happens with tempo?

Germans don't "feel" the tempo, they "think" it. They have a tendency to rationalize and premeditate the changes of beat and *tempo*, that is why their sound is so much that of an ensemble, a bit heavy, with the famous tendency to fall behind, in other words to play after the conductor's beat. Beyond being a tradition, this is an effective way of achieving precision in the entrances, the attacks, and it allows them to achieve richer orchestral sonority and colors that have a solid stylistic personality. Whereas, on the contrary, our Latin American orchestras don't think the *tempo*, they feel it.

How does this manifest itself as a whole?

In the Latin way of making music, the sense of rhythm is a main, innate and spontaneous ingredient. Obviously this does not mean that our best orchestras don't "think" the *tempo*; undoubtedly they do, but there is a tendency to feel it and allow themselves to be led by musical instinct. The end result is a sound that is much closer to the *battere*, in other words right on top of the conductor's gesture. On the whole, this produces a hesitant ensemble, one that is sometimes hasty and, paradoxically, off rhythm.

What happens with tuning?

Strangely enough, the contrary. In general the German orchestras don't "think" tuning, they "feel" it. Obviously musicians have to be very aware of smallest variables of frequency among them in order to be able to play together and in tune. But I would risk saying that this is more an intuitive than a rational process. That is why the characteristic German sound can be recognized for having weight, a very solid basis on the low registers of the body of the orchestra. This is because tuning is "felt" and built up from the low to the high tessituras. Latin orchestras, on the other hand, are more accustomed to "thinking" their tuning, rationalizing it, rather than feeling it. This, I think, is due simply to the fact that they are young groups that lack the tradition that makes the sense of tuning a spontaneous, automatic and intuitive action.

Are there any advantages for the Latin orchestras in this comparison?

Our orchestras' strong suit is not precisely tuning, but rather qualities having to do with the volume and brilliance of the sound, along with a strong dose of emotion.

To get back to self-esteem ...

What I mean is that our orchestras should not try to imitate the European ones, to have the "Berlin" sound or the "Vienna" sound, but develop their own virtues, follow a sort of genetic code. Our orchestras have to understand that what they like about the European sound is an intrinsic part of the individual character of each country and culture. For example, understanding the difference between "thinking" and "feeling," without losing their characteristic rich flexibility, would already be a step in the right direction. Incorporating what identifies us, without underestimating ourselves.

What form would this goal take?

I am firmly convinced that the challenge facing the symphony orchestra as such, above and beyond any geographical references –including Berlin, Vienna and New York— is the need to reinvent itself if it is to survive. And it is here that our orchestras have all the potential to do so. In this case, what will help the most is precisely that part of our younger-brother complex that weighs the most heavily on us: the lack of a great musical tradition. It is precisely this lack of traditions that means we don't carry a lot of baggage on this one way trip. Impossible as it may seem, the alternative for our orchestras is the challenge of excellence. Otherwise, the only alternative scenario, will be a declining artistic reality.

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