

Izquierdo returns to a conducting triumph

By Peter Jacobi

H-T Reviewer

His biography says he's been not only in his native Chile but in Berlin and Hamburg, in Vienna and Paris, in Eastern Europe and Israel. But where has Juan Pablo Izquierdo been?

Twenty years ago he spent a little time as member of the IU faculty. Thursday evening he returned briefly to lead the IU Festival Orchestra in a remarkable concert of challenges. When he and his players completed Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4, the MAC audience erupted into a prolonged ovation. It was well earned.

The performance of the Fourth was stunning. Under Izquierdo's intense guidance, the orchestra's attacks were clean, precise, whether in the marvelously delicate scherzo in which the strings sustain an extensive pizzicato or when, as in the finale, the decibels vibrate at the top of any sound meter. There were sensitive sectional balances and contrasts. But more important than that, the famous old symphony sounded fresh, restudied.

One could sense the care given the interpretation in the opening movement. Conductor and ensemble imbued the music with surging urgency, a nervous energy reflective of the emotional state that burdened Tchaikovsky when he wrote the symphony. The composer had trapped himself into a marriage, a state of life for which he was not sexually or psychologically suited and from which he sought immediate escape, describing himself "in a state bordering upon insanity."

The taut, wiry Izquierdo seemed at times in a demonic posture, jerking or sweeping his arms, bracing his legs for what approximated a racer's spring to action. Such flamboyant movements don't always result in better music. But for Izquierdo they worked. He had that orchestra in his grasp, and the music simply flowed.

He'd obviously made the most of rehearsals, too. This was an ensemble that knew his bidding. The resulting performance was worthy of recording, worthy of a major concert hall anywhere.

The Tchaikovsky came at the end

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of a fine program. The musicians opened with excerpts from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, one of the two or three greatest ballet scores of this century.

There was no question from the opening bars of the atmospheric "Montagues and Capulets" section that conductor and players were in sync emotionally and technically. Never mind that Konstantin Sergeyev and Galina Ulanova, the originals in this ballet when the Kirov introduced it in 1940, fought with the composer over the music's tricky rhythm. One could, on listening to the Festival Orchestra, imagine those great dancers portraying the tragic lovers. "Romeo at the Grave of Juliet," the final segment, held on this occasion all the required anguish. *Romeo and Juliet* was a hard act to follow.

But of course, there was the Tchaikovsky. And in between the musicians turned to Charles Ives' *The Unanswered Question*, a brief, intriguing work which would add stature to the "Music from the Hearts of Space" program on WFIU. It is soothingly intense, scored principally for muted strings. A quartet of woodwind players adds a little bite, as does a solo trumpeter placed by Izquierdo in the balcony as contrasting resonance. Ives subtitled the piece "a cosmic landscape." One can read almost anything into it. But when it's as well played as it was here, the soft, eerie sounds matter most. They're encompassing.

What an interesting concert it amounted to. And how splendidly it was achieved. Izquierdo is a major talent.

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