

ICO celebrates end of 30th season

By Tom Aldridge



Violinist Bella Hristova

Though Saturday's (May 16) ICO concert lasted nearly 2 1/2 hours, I was unaware of the passage of time. The second half was given over to a complete performance of Mendelssohn's incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op. 61. To all the familiar excerpts we know so well in concert performance, Kirk Trevor added two sopranos, a women's chorus and a narrator... plus music we seldom hear. It was a celebratory selection for Trevor's final ICO concert as its music director.

In collaboration with the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis' Laureate Series, we earlier heard 2006 sixth-place laureate Bella Hristova play the Paganini "pot boiler," a more descriptive name for his Violin Concerto No. 1 in D, Op. 6. Trevor began his final ICO concert with Manuel de Falla's Suite No. 1 from his ballet *The Three-Cornered Hat*, creating a truly varietal program.

To begin at the beginning, Falla's *Three-Cornered Hat* music is a richly orchestrated example of turn-of-the-20th-century Latin music; indeed his style is a Spanish counterpart to Puccini's: lush harmonic instrumentation, memorable melodies and driving rhythms. Though Falla employs continuing

castanets, a wordless men's chorus briefly chanting and a soprano near Suite 1's beginning, Trevor substituted his brass players, shortened that opening and omitted the soprano and castanets. To those unfamiliar with the piece it sounded fine. In fact, so did the remaining dances of that first suite, which didn't provide any further alterations.

I termed the Paganini a pot boiler because it's a violin display piece with a very low musical density (and an obnoxious bass drum pounding on most of the strong beats), along with an interminably long first movement. Yet Hristova prevented it from being wholly boring by playing it beautifully over its three movements. In fact, I don't recall her playing this well in her 2006 competition appearance. She managed all the "stuff" with aplomb that Paganini threw at her, and did it with a nicely centered tone, all but equaling the finest laureates to emerge from the competition. Plus Trevor's orchestra easily held up their end of the bargain.

In 1826 when he was 17, Mendelssohn wrote and scored his Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a work he never equaled, much less surpassed in his later years (indeed even Mozart up through that age had not written anything to equal it). When he was nearly twice that age in 1843, he was commissioned to write a complete incidental music to the Shakespeare play--built around the Overture. All of it proclaimed Mendelssohn at his greatest. Using narrator Dr. Jeff Swensson, sopranos Leah Crane and Robin Tolbert, and the Encore Vocal Arts women's chorus, Trevor conducted, for the first time I've ever witnessed, the entire incidental music.

It was worth the wait; Trevor managed the cuing of the orchestra, the narrator and the vocalists such as to indicate a thorough rehearsal. To the "Scherzo," the "Intermezzo," the "Nocturne" and the world famous "Wedding March," we heard "A Dance of Clowns"--adapted from the Overture, and the Finale, which added the Encore Vocal Arts to the early part of the Overture. I thought to myself as I left the concert that if Mendelssohn had evolved musically after age 17 as Mozart did, he would easily have been the world's greatest composer.

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