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THAT'S PROFESSIONALISM: RICARDO PAZ AND NANCY TOONE

by
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There were two chairs and two microphones. Accompanied by applause, Ricardo Paz entered the Garrison Choral Room in the Val A. Browning Center at Weber State University alone, wearing a formal dark suit and carrying an acoustic classical guitar. He sat down and began to play a piece by Johann Sebastian Bach: *Prelude, Fugue, and Allegro BWV 998*.

You could have heard a pin drop, and if a pin had dropped, it would have been deafening. Such was the precision, delicacy, and pure clarity of this piece. The audience was absolutely still. No one moved, or shuffled, or coughed. It seemed they hardly breathed.

Paz is a native of Mexico, and the program notes his musical studies began with Luis Robert and Manuel Lopez Ramos. He continued with Juan Carlos Laguna at the National School of Music of the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico and graduated as a guitar performer. He continued his studies by taking master guitar lessons with Norio Sato, Robert Guthrie, Frank Koonce, and Wolfgang Lendle.

It was a privilege to see and hear this performance. Paz went on to play *Suite in A minor* by Manuel M. Ponce, consisting of *Preludio, Allemande, Sarabande, Gavotte I-II* and *Gigue*. Many different techniques are incorporated in these pieces---rolling arpeggios, clear melody lines, chords and harmonies, and all were performed with versatility and skill.

A truly standout piece was the first after intermission, *Natarayah*, by Mario Lavista. This particular concert, on April 29th, 2005, the program said, marked the first time this piece has been performed in Utah. The title, *Natarayah*, Paz informed us, is the Sanskrit word for dance, bringing to mind the manifestation of the Hindu deity Shiva as Nataraja, the "Lord of the Dance."

Natarayah had several different repeating themes and very intriguing rhythms. It also had an impressive use of chordal extensions. These created moments of intense dissonance which then would revert again to the rhythmic "dancing" motif. Paz was absolutely on target with all of this, moving through the many shifts in tempo and technique with a confidence and surety.

For the last selection in this concert, Paz was assisted by Nancy Toone. Toone is a professional flautist, a member of the board of the Utah Flute Association, the current director of the Weber State University Flute Choir, and Acting Flute Professor for USU for 2004-2005. Toone entered wearing formal black trousers, a white blouse, and a gorgeous calf length brown and black patterned silk shawl with fringe. The two of them took their seats, positioned their respective instruments, and immediately the mood changed. They appeared to have been performing together for years.

The piece they played was *Histoire du tango*, by Astor Piazzolla, consisting of *Bordel*, *Cafe'*, *Night-club*, and *Concert d'aujourd' hui*. This piece also had intriguing rhythms and syncopation. Flute and guitar is a wonderful instrumental blend, and Toone is an extremely powerful flautist. She too attacked each phrase with confidence and skill. This music was exciting. Parts of it were very fast and technically difficult, and Paz and Toone traded the spotlight, and both shone. There were interesting uses of harmonics, and at one point Toone soloed while Paz performed a percussion accompaniment by slapping the body of his guitar. Similar to what is called modern music, or experimental Jazz, the time and tempos of *Histoire du tango* are on-the-edge-of-your-seat unpredictable-- always impressive when done well and just right. Which these were.

It is hard to believe that such a performance was free to the public. The Garrison Choral Room was almost at capacity, so it would not be good to say that more people should have attended. Perhaps it would be better to thank the Weber State University Department of the Performing Arts for providing the opportunity for us to see and hear Ricardo Paz and Nancy Toone. Those of us who did will not forget it.

After the performance, I asked them how much rehearsal they'd had together. They had been playing other concerts in Utah for the last couple of weeks, and the concert at the Browning Center was their last together. But how many rehearsals together before performing? They conferred.

"Three," Paz said. "Three rehearsals."

That's professionalism.

On May 6th, the Weber State University Department of the Performing Arts is presenting another free musical performance, this one by the New American Symphony Orchestra. For more information, call the WSU Performing Arts hotline at 626-6800, or visit the website at www.departments.weber.edu/PerformingArts.