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CLASSICAL REVIEW

CSO's journey along 'The Inca Trail' a treat for trekkers

By John von Rhein

Tribune critic

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On Thursday night, Chicago Symphony Orchestra guest conductor Miguel Harth-Bedoya led a crowd of happy trekkers on a journey in music and images along the Inca Trail, the vast network of pathways built during the Inca Empire that connect his native Peru to five neighboring South American countries.

It's hard to say how many new listeners snapped at the bait, but I found the multimedia event—a cornerstone of the season-long "Echoes of Nations" celebration—a refreshing departure from the usual subscription concert fare and format.


Harth-Bedoya's colorful and imaginative sampler of works from Peru, Ecuador, Argentina and Chile sought to link the ancient Inca Trail with contemporary Latin America. Working in fluid accompaniment to the music were views of Peruvian street scenes, the ruins of Machu Picchu and old-new visual art, projected onto a large overhead screen.

Too many such programs devolve into gimmickry, but this one was smartly put together and presented with enough flair to transcend gimmickry.

After a lush arrangement of "El Condor Pasa," the conductor offered his own charming, Respighi-like arrangement of ancient instrumental pieces collected by a Catholic bishop in Peru near the end of the 18th Century.

Ecuadorian composer Diego Luzuriaga's rousing "Responsorio" surged with the propulsive rhythms of Carlos Chavez and Leonard Bernstein in his mambo vein. Gabriela Lena Frank's sonically arresting tone poem, "Illapa," depicted an Inca god in eerily evocative, otherworldly sounds played on metal and bamboo flutes by the remarkable Jessica Warren-Acosta.

CSO composer-in-residence Osvaldo Golijov was represented by his lyrical, elegiac "Mariel,"



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beautifully played by CSO cellist Kenneth Olsen. The concert concluded with Enrique Soro's "Tres Aires Chilenos," which sounded like movie music; and Jimmy Lopez's "Fiesta!" which packed explosive brass licks and wild fusillades of drums.

jvonrhein@tribune.com

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

When: 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Orchestra Hall,

220 S. Michigan Ave.

Tickets: 312-294-3000

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