

## *Review*

### **Symphony notes America's brassy, tender sides Robinson displays strong control ovre works, solo by Besley.**

By David Prensky  
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The Palm Beach Symphony began its 2006-07 season Tuesday at the Flagler Museum with an enthusiastically received all-American program. This was the first concert in a series of five, each of which will consist of music from one particular country.

The American inaugural program will be followed, in order, by the music of Spain, France, Germany and Italy. "Music is the true international language," explained Ray Robinson, the symphony's musical director and this concert's conductor, adding that people in different countries are able to communicate through music when neither speaks the language of the other.

The Tuesday concert began and ended with works by Aaron Copland, a Brooklyn-born son of East European immigrants. Starting the evening with his Fanfare for the Common Man was a fitting choice. Fanfares are brassy announcements of the arrival of distinguished guests and this one was commissioned by conductor Eugene Goosens during World War II. Goosens, appreciating the Americanism of Copland's work, said, "... it deserves a special occasion for its performance ... We will premiere it at income tax time."

The brass and percussion sections, for which the work is scored, played splendidly under Robinson's crisp conducting. They called the meeting to order in proper commanding fashion.

Morton Gould's American Salute followed and this less frequently performed work continued the theme of national pride.

It is based on the Civil War song, When Johnny Comes Marching Home, introduced after the orchestra's loud clamor for attention, is a low register by the bassoon and the bass clarinet. It is then treated with eight variations, the treatment of the martial air ranging from hushed and reflective to exuberant and stirring, which it most certainly was when its final chords rang out.

Gould, who was born in 1917, died in 1996. Two years before his death he was honored at Washington's Kennedy Center. A year later, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for musical composition.

The subdued nature of Samuel Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915 was a marked change from the clamorous lead-off works. Based on James Agee's autobiographical prose poem introduction to his novel, A Death in the Family, the music itself is poetic in nature and the playing captured the mood admirably.

Young soprano Megan Besley sang with a purity fitting to express the innocence and wonderment of the child to whose words the music was set. Robinson maintained tight control

over his combined forces, realizing just the right blend of sounds, a truly superb feat considering the far-from-optimal acoustics of the hall.

Leonard Bernstein's Dances from his ballet, *Fancy Free*, is music of the loud, bustling big city and calls to mind the bright lights of Broadway. In fact, the ballet, soon after it premiered, was converted into the stage musical *On The Town*, in which Bernstein's music and the clever lyrics of Comden and Green joined in such joyous songs as *New York, New York* and made hits of both the play and the later movie.

The three dances making up the concert suite are all foreign in origin: The Galop, Waltz and Danzon. The first is old Europe; the second Viennese; the third Cuban. Bernstein's syncopated rhythms and employment of blue notes, however, give distinctly American flavor to all of them.

There was a return to Samuel Barber for the next number. *Adagio For Strings* is an arrangement for string orchestra, at Arturo Toscanini's request, of the slow movement of Barber's B Minor String Quartet. Its beautiful, bitter sweet melodiousness made the Italian maestro eager to have it converted into something he could conduct in concert. It soon became a staple in orchestra repertoires and has been rescored many times.

Robinson drew from his players the tenderness and right sonorities the work demands. He showed noteworthy restraint in curbing the ever-present temptation to add too much sugar to the mix.

The evening ended as it began with a Copland work on a very American theme; one from the wide open spaces of our Western cattle country. *Rodeo* is a ballet commissioned during World War II by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and choreographed by Agnes de Mille.

It is a love story, but a rough-and-tumble cowboy one, and the pitching and tossing in the rodeo itself are vividly suggested in the music.

What adds greatly to the sound picture are incorporated folk and cowboy songs and the square dance music that blares out after the sound of country fiddlers tuning up is heard. The Hoedown, the last number of the four-dance suite was just the right grand finale to end the event. The audience, looking reluctant to depart, stood to join in a fortissimo ovation.