

Posted June 3, 2008 / Baltimore Sun

BSO's journey down 'Inca Trail' is enlightening

Tim Smith | Music

Not long into the new century, the [Baltimore Symphony Orchestra](#) introduced a new series designed to loosen up the concert-giving format (no white tie and tails, extra chat from the stage), and entice a younger, hipper crowd with the prospect of live jazz and martini bars in the lobby.

It sounded like a gimmick, and it looked like a gimmick because it *was* a gimmick. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Orchestras everywhere will try out new ways to improve box-office receipts and demographics, and the BSO's Symphony With a Twist series is about as good an idea as any others that have been floated around the country.

The only trouble was that BSO planners didn't seem to agree on exactly what the Twist venture was meant to be, how to "brand" it (don't you hate that word?) so clearly and distinctly that it could develop a strong identity and consistent appeal.

Sometimes, it was used to introduce unusual repertoire that cocktail-lubricated audiences weren't necessarily craving. (Remember Tan Dun's Concerto for Water Percussion and Orchestra?) Sometimes, it was used to offer fare that might just as easily be on a regular classical series, or even a pops one. No wonder attendance fluctuated.

But the Twist series remains part of the BSO's product line, and it remains as promising as it was when it made its debut. Maybe the trick to fulfilling that promise is to come up with more things like last weekend's Twist venture.

A big, happy crowd turned out Saturday night at [Meyerhoff Symphony Hall](#) for a program called "The Inca Trail." It was one of the best Twist concerts I've attended, marked by inventive programming and a lot of flair in the music-making, as well as a mostly effective multimedia component.

Miguel Harth-Bedoya, the Peruvian-born music director of the Fort Worth Symphony from Texas, was the engaging tour guide. He conducted with a minimum of fuss and a great deal of character through a hefty, enlightening sampling of Latin American repertoire, and he drew consistently cohesive, stylish playing from the orchestra.

From a haunting arrangement of *El Condor Pasa* by Daniel Alomia Robles to a snazzy assortment of such popular pieces as *Granada* (complemented by sultry dancers Rosa Collantes and Jason Colacino), the program crackled with energy.

This journey down the Inca Trail included some remarkable contemporary fare. Osvaldo

Golijov's *Mariel*, an elegy of darkly beautiful lyricism, provided a fine vehicle for principal cellist Ilya Finkelshteyn, whose warm tone and eloquent phrasing reached the heart of the score.

Gabriela Lena Frank's *Illapa*, a moody evocation of an Inca god, revealed a riveting sonic freshness. Diego Luzuriaga's propulsive *Responsorio* was fun. Jimmy Lopez's *Fiesta!* had a kinetic kick, with great brass licks and percussion flourishes (only the rather clichéd ending proved a let-down). Frank, Luzuriaga and Lopez were on hand to enjoy ovations.

Although the violins sounded a little thin at times, they dug into the program as vibrantly as the other sections. Among the notable solo contributions were those by concertmaster Jonathan Carney, trombonist [Chris Dudley](#), trumpeter Rene Hernandez and flutist Emily Skala.

Harth-Bedoya's dynamic approach to everything - he had the *Malambo* from Ginastera's *Estancia* really smoking - made up for awkward silences while explanatory texts were displayed on a screen that otherwise was used to display striking imagery for some of the music.