



Music Review: Pablo Ziegler & Metropole Orkest - Amsterdam Meets New Tango

By Jack Goodstein, BLOGCRITICS.ORG - Published 8:03 am, Sunday, May 19, 2013

"Buenos Aires Report," the opening composition of Argentine pianist/composer Pablo Ziegler's collaboration with the Netherlands' Metropole Orkest, *Amsterdam Meets New Tango*, is a good indication of the emotional grit that characterizes the album's aesthetic. Ziegler, as Gustavo Conde's liner notes explain, is "a key exponent of contemporary Buenos Aires urban music, centered on pure tango" seasoned with "aspects of jazz improvisation." This is the new tango, a genre pioneered by Astor Piazzolla (with whose quintet Ziegler had played for more than 10 years), and Ziegler had learned from the master. The composition is a programmatic portrait of the chaos of life in a city like Buenos Aires. It takes what Piazzolla began and pushes it to new heights.

This is a big album with a big sound, combining Ziegler's quartet - guitarist Quique Sinesi, Walter Castro on bandoneon, and guest percussionist Quintino Cinalli - with the full scale Netherlands orchestra. It is a combination that works. The Metropole Orkest, founded in 1945, had worked with the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie and Al Jarreau over the years. These are musicians that know what they are doing when it comes to playing with jazz artists. There is some truly fine solo work from all through the orchestra, dynamically complimenting the improvisations of the smaller ensemble. The larger orchestra, under the direction of Jules Buckley, clearly has bought into Ziegler's vision.

Of the nine original pieces on the album, all rooted in Latin American rhythms, one is by Sinesi and the rest are Ziegler compositions. Most are variations on the tango. "Desperate Dance," for example, Ziegler explains is unusual because instead of a normal 2/4 tango rhythm it has a non-symmetrical 7/4 rhythm. He says when he was composing it he imagined dancers feeling desperate because they were having trouble dancing to the unusual rhythm. "Blues Porteno" is an exciting blues version of the new tango, and "Murga del Amanecer," he says is "carnival music" with African origins. "Que Lo Pario" is an example of a gaucho folk rhythm called malambo, written as a tribute to Argentine author Roberto "El Negro" Fontanarrosa.

"Pajaro Angel" and "Places," on the other hand, are kind of outliers. "Pajaro Angel" was composed as a slow waltz for a TV series all the way back in 1973, while "Places" (originally written for a contemporary music festival in the U.K.) was composed "expressionistically" and "developed as if it were a contemporary sonata." These last two pieces are especially interesting in the context of the orchestral treatment, as perhaps is the dark, moody "Buenos Aires Dark," which was written during a 2001 Argentine political crisis.

Amsterdam Meets New Tango combines elements of world music and jazz with hints of classical composition. The collaboration with the large orchestra is much in the tradition of some of the jazz suites of Duke Ellington and Stan Kenton.