

The Chautauquan Daily

Pablo Ziegler Classical Tango Quartet heats up chilly evening in Amp

By Zachary Lewis | June 27, 2012 | Photo: Lauren Rock

The audience Monday night at the Amphitheater desperately needed something to heat it up, and the Pablo Ziegler Classical Tango Quartet provided exactly that.

On an evening when temperatures surely dipped below 60 degrees, Ziegler and friends radiated tons of welcome energy in the form of Argentine dance music of the highest, liveliest order.

Everything the ensemble served up was a tango, strictly speaking. But so wide was the variety on its ample, 14-piece menu, so considerable the talent of the musicians, that those in the crowd could never have been anything less than fully engaged.



What is a tango quartet, you ask? Well, with Ziegler, a Latin Grammy Award-winning pianist from Argentina and the host of Monday's concert, the group — one of many Ziegler performs with — consisted of piano; bass, Pedro Giraudó; cello, Jisoo Ok; and Hector Del Curto on bandoneón, a small, handheld instrument similar to an accordion.

It's the latter instrument that made the most difference, that gave the group its unique sound on its second visit to Chautauqua. With the sensuous, hugely expressive bandoneón in the mix, the audience was whisked instantly and undeniably to the bars and dance halls of Buenos Aires, where Astor Piazzolla, the grandfather of the tango and Ziegler's one-time musical partner, found so much inspiration.

The combo dutifully paid tribute to Piazzolla several times. At show's end, for instance, they took up the famous, rollicking "Libertango," a mainstay even at classical concerts. Nearer the beginning, they introduced a fascinating, more intricate number called "Fugue and Mystery," wherein a gorgeous tango emerged from a thicket of counterpoint like the sun from a patch of storm clouds. If anyone doubted the seriousness of the tango quartet's musical training, the piece laid all such concerns to rest.

Most of the program, though, featured Ziegler's own music, an apparent treasure trove of sophisticated, well-conceived tango melodies heavily influenced by jazz and steeped in everything from boisterous good spirits to melancholic musing. Whatever the subject, however, his music possessed that special something that made passive listening impossible and easily overpowered even the chilliest lake breezes.

Specific titles were sometimes difficult to catch. Most of them Ziegler announced after the fact, rapidly, in a mellifluous, tough-to-process Argentine accent. But no matter. The music itself communicated readily, speaking a language universal and simple to understand.

(Continued...)

Many numbers were everything one looks for in an authentic tango: vibrant dances marked by driving rhythms, tremendous passion and sparkling solos. Certainly, all those traits were present in “*Otra Vez*” and “Buenos Aires Report,” two of Ziegler’s most upbeat concoctions.

But the highlights of the evening were those pieces where Ziegler and company took the tango in more thoughtful, unexpected directions. “*Milonga del Adios*,” a stately, deep-hued conversation between Ziegler and Ok, was perhaps the most openly beautiful and tuneful of them. No less stunning, though, was “Below Zero,” a slower number in which Del Curto’s sighing bandoneón powerfully replicated the subtleties and feeling of the human voice, all within the framework of a dance.

In short, it turned out to be a warm evening. Among Ziegler, his Classical Tango colleagues, and all the animated toe-tapping their performances induced, Chautauquans Monday had everything they needed to stay nice and toasty.

Lewis is music critic of The Plain Dealer in Cleveland, Ohio.