

ALEX GALLARDO *Los Angeles Times*

UNEXPECTED PLEASURES: Sayako Kusaka, right, with Eduard Schmieder, solos on Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons" at Disney Hall.

MUSIC REVIEW

Seasonal renewal from Vivaldi

Adjusting for a soloist's illness, iPalpiti revises its program and goes on with the show.

By CHRIS PASLES
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The sudden illness of a key soloist almost derailed the plans of the 10th annual International Laureates Festival, conceived by Laura and Eduard Schmieder, which culminated in a program by the iPalpiti Orchestral Ensemble on Thursday at the Walt Disney Concert Hall. But the resilience of Eduard Schmieder, who conducted, and the prize-winning musicians, ages 19 to 32 and from around the world, prevailed.

Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons" replaced Mendelssohn's Concerto for Violin, Piano and Orchestra in D minor, with Japanese violinist Sayako Kusaka, one of the original soloists, showcased in the familiar score.

The new piece complemented Astor Piazzolla's "Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas" (The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires), with jazz pianist Bill Cunliffe stepping in for the ailing Russian pianist, Vassily Primakov. And a piece by Enesco was replaced by one of Mendelssohn's short early but accomplished string symphonies, No. 10 in B minor.

Kusaka was a secure, fluent soloist who tended to use vibrato sparingly and resisted any grandstanding. Indeed, her collaborations with German concertmaster Peter Rainer, American cellist Nicholas Canelakis and Korean Canadian harpsichordist Jennie Jung revealed unexpected pleasures of the score.

Schmieder kept the 22-member orchestra lively and transparent, judiciously using contrasts and degrees of dynamic for expressive ends. The musicians played with vivid unanimity and commitment.

Folk singer and actor Theodore Bikel read the descriptive

poems, presumably by Vivaldi, before each concerto. Dennis Tremblay, Los Angeles Philharmonic principal bass, joined the orchestra throughout.

The emotional high point of the program was Osvaldo Golijov's tragic two-movement work, "Last Round," composed in 1996 in homage to Piazzolla, who died in 1992. Schmieder dedicated the performance from the stage to Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter who was kidnapped and murdered by Islamic militants — Schmieder sadly called them "hypnotized fanatics" — in Karachi in 2002.

The first movement is an aggressive, agitated conflict between two quartets standing across from each other (Piazzolla was a fighter, and the title is meant to suggest a boxing match). The second, "Muertes del Angel" (Deaths of the Angel), is a powerful threnody that evokes a slow-moving cortege. The playing was masterly.

By contrast, Piazzolla's "Four Seasons," which followed to close

the program, seemed anticlimactic, although it was clever, melodious and well-played.

For an encore, the group toasted its anniversary with a witty set of variations on "Happy Birthday."

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