

Guitarist Barrueco is amazing

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"SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE," UTAH SYMPHONY AND GUITARIST MANUEL BARRUECO, Abravanel Hall, Friday; additional performance tonight, 8 p.m. (355-2787)

It's been several years since a guitarist joined the Utah Symphony. And it's a nice break from the usual violin and piano concerto fare when something a little out of the ordinary comes to the symphony.

This weekend, Manuel Barrueco became one of the few guitarists to play with the Utah Symphony. He joined guest conductor Thierry Fischer in what is without question the most popular guitar concerto ever penned — Joaquin Rodrigo's "Concierto de Aranjuez."

Not only is Rodrigo's work an audience favorite, it's also one of the most mellifluous works to come from any composer. A natural gift for melody combined with colorful orchestration makes this concerto quite literally irresistible.

Add to this mixture Barrueco's amazing musicality and wonderful expressiveness, then one definitely has a winner.

Not only does Barrueco possess fine musicianship but also wonderful technique and an amazing mastery of his instrument. And being Cuban, Barrueco comes to this Latin-infused concerto naturally.

Fischer's approach to the score was no less impressive. He elicited a nuanced performance from the orchestra that matched the soloist's playing. Both he and Barrueco brought subtlety and eloquence to the score.

Particularly striking for the beautiful playing of both the soloist and the orchestra was the second movement. A hauntingly evocative melody, first played by the English horn (exquisitely performed by Holly Gornik), permeates the movement, and both the soloist and orchestra played it with feeling.

The concert ended with another famous work

— Hector Berlioz's "Symphonie Fantastique." And although it's been played many times over the years by the Utah Symphony, it hasn't been played like this in a long time. Fischer brought vitality, vibrancy, drive and electricity to his reading. It was insightful and penetrating, and he explored the music in depth bringing it to life dramatically.

Once again, Fischer elicited a nuanced performance from the orchestra, and it, in turn, played at its highest level of musicianship and virtuosity.

The concert opened with Maurice Ravel's radiantly colorful "Alborado del gracioso."

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