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The Dutchman Flies Right Off the Wall



Michael McElroy for The New York Times

The audience in a park at the New World Center in Miami Beach, where the New World Symphony presented its first Wallcast concert through 167 speakers projected onto a 7,000-square-foot wall. More Photos »

By ANTHONY TOMMASINI
Published: January 30, 2011

MIAMI BEACH — On Friday night at the New World Center here the New World Symphony, a top-notch training orchestra, presented its first free Wallcast concert. Remember that name, Wallcast, because it is going to catch on.

Inside the center the orchestra, conducted by its founder and artistic director, Michael Tilson Thomas, played works by Wagner, Thomas Adès and Copland: the same program with which it officially inaugurated its handsome, intimate new 756-seat concert hall on Wednesday. But outside the center, which was designed by Frank Gehry, in a new adjacent 2.5-acre park called Miami Beach SoundScape, a much larger audience watched the concert as the video was relayed live on the 7,000-square-foot white wall next to the center's inviting glass entryway. The typical shortcoming

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Michael McElroy for The New York Times  
The New World Symphony's Wallcast concert in Miami Beach. [More Photos](#) »

of every outdoor concert, whether it's the [New York Philharmonic](#) or a hyperamplified rock band, is the sound system.

But at the New World Center a rectangular area of the park near the wall screen is surrounded by 167 high-quality speakers tucked neatly into a rectangular network of horizontal and vertical tubes. It looks more like an enormous tubular sculpture than an array of speakers.

The big news here is the high quality of the sound, the best outdoor amplification I have ever heard. During Mr. Thomas's performance of Wagner's "Flying Dutchman" Overture, the orchestra came through with remarkable presence, body and clarity. Sitting in the park watching the broadcast you do not detect the music coming from any particular set of speakers. Rather, it permeates the space.

The good sound quality combined with the terrific live videos to make this a memorable musical experience. The cameras imaginatively segued from images of the entire orchestra to close-ups of individual players, zoom shots and fanciful overhead views. And on this huge screen, Mr. Thomas and his musicians looked larger than life.

The New World Symphony must have done good advance work for this first Wallcast. With crisp, almost balmy weather, every bit of the viewing area was filled with people reclining on the grass or sitting on folding chairs

brought from home. And most concertgoers listened attentively. The outdoor audience applauded eagerly, giving Mr. Thomas and the orchestra a cheering ovation at the end of Copland's Third Symphony, which concluded the program.

In many ways I enjoyed the music making as much as I had in the hall on Wednesday. Hearing Mr. Adès's new 15-minute oceanic piece "Polaris: Voyage for Orchestra" (which incorporates a film by Tal Rosner) a second time, I got much more out of it and was impressed by its relentless sweep and organic structure. It was touching to see close-ups of Mr. Thomas's face during the performance of the Copland, a work he clearly reveres, and a populist score that was especially fitting for this outdoor concert.

Inevitably there are amusing aspects of live video broadcasts that cannot be controlled. Some of the close-ups of Mr. Thomas showed a few audience members right behind him in the front row who looked sleepy, including a woman who dozed right through the exhilarating "Fanfare for the Common Man" when it burst forth in the Copland symphony.

Mr. Thomas, smiling and looking gigantic, appeared in a charming recorded introduction to the Wallcast concert. But nothing happened during the intermission. Ideally the New World Symphony should fill that time with features. Live or recorded interviews with the players would be perfect. Thanks to these Wallcast concerts the young musicians of the orchestra could well become local celebrities.

Every orchestra in America should check out the Wallcast concerts at SoundScape, which set a new standard for the outdoor relaying of indoor musical performances.

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A version of this review appeared in print on January 31, 2011, on page C1 of the New York edition.

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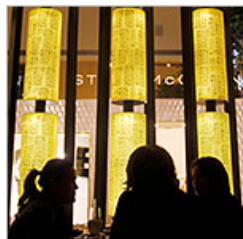


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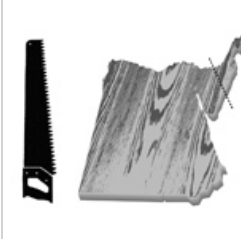
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