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A Spanish landscape at the Bowl

THE weather Tuesday night at the Hollywood Bowl was a little too cool to reflect the "Sultry Spanish Nights" title of the Los Angeles Philharmonic program. But the music-making, led by the orchestra's assistant conductor, Joana Carneiro, justified the description.

Four works by Ravel and Falla traced a varied Spanish landscape and the moods of love and play of its people.

The highlight was Falla's "El amor brujo" (Love, the Magician), a multi-movement work composed in 1915 that evolved through several incarnations as a stage work, ballet and concert piece. It can still be seen as a ballet or on an orchestra program.

The story tells of a young, widowed Gypsy freeing herself from her husband's ghost, who will not let her take a new lover. The "Ritual Fire Dance," in which the heroine, Candelas, tries unsuccessfully to exorcise the ghost, is a familiar concert staple. But the whole score including four songs, a lyric interlude and a great new-day-is-dawning finale enchants.

Carneiro and the orchestra dug into the music with zest, evoking rugged, earthy life and passion, calm respite and mystical ceremony.

The "Ritual Fire Dance" crackled with pulsing energy. The interlude was beautiful and gave opportunities for principal players to shine, including concertmaster Alexander Treger, violist Dale Hikawa Silverman, cellist Daniel Rothmuller, oboist Ariana Ghez and clarinetist Michele Zukovsky.

Brazilian vocalist Luciana Souza, a three-time Grammy Award nominee, sang expressively, with cool, crystalline clarity in the heights and husky smokiness in the depths.

The music also inspired a cricket, situated somewhere among the box seats, to trill with delirious delight.

Brazilian pianist Arnaldo Cohen was the soloist in Falla's evocative "Nights in the Gardens of Spain." It was difficult to ascertain the range of subtle colors he might have produced due to the amplification system that made the piano sound tubby even as it allowed for great orchestral transparency.

Nonetheless, the orchestra's orgasmic climax and postlude in the first part and, especially, the pianist's brilliant, guitar-like flourishes and the rhythmic, answering strings in the last were memorable.

Ravel's "Rapsodie espagnole" opened the program by laying out a quiet, velvety carpet of sound that seemed too subtle for the great outdoors, but which captivated the attentive ear. The big, splashier sections came through just fine.

Carneiro closed the program with a measured account of Ravel's "Bolero," a 17-minute crescendo composed in 1928 for a ballet featuring Ida Rubinstein.

Absent any choreography Maurice Béjart created a familiar steamy version in 1960 the piece, if you don't laugh at it outright, can serve as a young person's guide to the orchestra or anyone's sonic cocktail.

The wild applause at the end suggested a high level of happy intoxication.