

"Far Cry" shows new face of classical music

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"A Far Cry" is a worthy exemplar of the changing face of classical music.

At Gates Concert Hall on Tuesday night, the Denver debut of the Boston-based string orchestra proved what's possible when classical music is infused with a fresh and fearless point of view.

The 16 so-called Criers opened with Gabriela Lena Frank's "Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout," a musical exploration of identity across continental borders. With vigor and vitality to spare, the talented virtuosos — skillfully led by violinist Jae Cosmos Lee) — probed multi-religious, multicultural themes within a storyline that recalls Andean legends ("leyendas").

Throughout the six-part work, the Criers navigated complex harmonies with zealous enthusiasm and unwavering confidence.

"Leyendas" merges classical motifs with Andean folk flourishes for a playful, exciting effect that is at once familiar and foreign. The Criers' engaging representation of pan pipes, the charango (a lute-like stringed instrument from South America) and other unusual sounds showcased their versatile technique, while the sensual final movement, "Coqueteos," evidenced a strong emotional cohesion among the players.

Along with pianist Joel Fan, the Criers then delivered a rollicking reading of Mozart's 11th piano concerto. Fan's light touch and pristine technique blended well with the ensemble's muted but still buoyant accompaniment rendering an overall airy, almost casual mood.

Also on the program was a lyrical, wonderfully expressive rendition of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48. Led by violinist Ashley Vandiver, the Mozartian second movement was particularly polished and carefree.

The Criers' meditative, deeply-felt interpretation of Antonin Dvorák's Nocturne in B Major, Op. 40 rounded out the program, which closed with a brief, contemplative encore by William Bolcom.

The young, conductorless ensemble — also featuring especially strong performance from violinist Sharon Cohen and violist Jason Fisher — is only in its fourth season. No doubt, we'll hear from — and about — the Criers as they continue their ascent.

The concert repeats Friday night at the Vilar Performing Arts Center in Beaver Creek at 6:30 p.m. For information, call 888-920-2787.