

Second fiddle to a cicada

SATURDAY. We arrive in Rio — intact. By we, I refer to the London Festival Orchestra — to nine violinists, two each of viola, cello, oboe and horn players, to one bass player, one Artistic Director (with cello), one trumpet soloist, and me.

The achievement is commendable — no smashed instruments, no missed connections. The only tragedy so far is the loss of two sets of tails, mysteriously left in New York. Happily, they turn up, a day late, but in time for the first concert.

As officer in charge of blame and problems, I am hugely relieved, since the idea of having to track down the Brazilian equivalent of Moss Bros, and persuade them to allow us to hire two such outfits for the coming concerts in seven cities in Brazil, Paraguay, Mexico, Barbados, Cuba, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Mexico again — is quite grim, and gladly avoided.

Everyone is extremely pleased to be in Rio — the second fiddles rush on to the beach to play football, violas and cellos make a pilgrimage up the Sugar Loaf. Nobody was quite prepared for the general shabbiness of the place, but the fiction retains its hold over the facts, and already the tour is considered to be going Very Well Indeed.

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ON THE way in from the airport, our guide from the Mozarteum Brasileiro (which has organised the Brazilian leg of the tour) explains that the campaign for the first round of the presidential election is hotting up. This becomes immediately obvious when our journey is slowed down by a demonstration involving several

hysterical flag-bearers and a milk lorry. Apparently, inside said float is a Mr Brizola, one of the 22 candidates anxious for the job. As an ex-mayor of Rio, he is a strong local favourite. He also turns out to be a noisy neighbour, and we quickly join the ranks of his opponents.

From my hotel room, I look on to some of the poorest and most dangerous slums in Brazil. These *favelas* look quaint, if modest, and it is hard to believe that they harbour three million desperate people — but it is well known that the Rio police refuse to enter them. Many of these *favela* inhabitants haunt the beaches, stalking unmanned

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bags, dangling ear-rings, cameras, hotel keys and gold chains. They are fearless and quick, but I am happy to report that the only LFO booty they secured during the second-fiddle football match was one packet of cigarettes.

The concert in Rio, first of the tour, is a brilliant success. The hall, like that up-country in Menuis, is a mini-replica of the Paris Opera — rich in alabaster, exotic woods and red carpets, and the acoustic is excellent. Ole Edvard Antonsen, the trumpeter, trots out the Tartini Trumpet Concerto with vim and vigour, note perfect. In the second half, the Grieg *Holberg Suite* is greeted with bated breath, and the Boccherini *Devil's House* Symphony with amusement and ovations. Ross

Pople, the director, is pleased, and the promoters delighted. Never, we are told, have the Brazilians been treated to such verve and finesse. Over-indulged in *Caipirinhas* (the local cocktail) and compliments, we have just enough strength to agree before collapsing with jet lag.

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AND SO to Sao Paulo — Brazil's city of dreams. At least 14 million people, stacked in endless skyscrapers, or huddled in shacks. A grim, grey place, almost entirely ugly. The concert hall appears to be in the middle of a large car park and in the best tradition of modern concert halls is barely convenient and quite soulless. Several players are quick to react to this, and much mineral water has to be poured on sweated brows. But the concert is even better than the first, and the Mozarteum takes us out to dinner to celebrate.

Since then, we have given concerts in Porto Alegre; in Oscar Niemeyer's magnificent but musically unsympathetic hall in Brasilia; in Belo Horizonte, where the glow of sunburn added an altogether brighter dimension to the performance; in tumbledown Salvador; and last night in Recife, where the Haydn symphony had to be interrupted to make way for a virtuoso performance by a cicada.

Ahead of us, the Iguacu Falls, the Caribbean, and endless possibilities for disaster. Exciting, exhausting, often hilarious, sometimes daunting, and all in a week's work.

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