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Gustavo Dudamel hip-hops it, John Adams shakes it, Neil Diamond plays it cool it at LA Phil Gala

October 8, 2010 | 12:32 pm



At Walt Disney Concert Hall on Thursday night, [Herbie Hancock](#) was enthusing in black tie and Neil Diamond was conspicuously inconspicuous in a sea of silver-haired tuxedoed men and immaculately glamorous women.

Meanwhile, on a nearby dance floor, [John Adams](#), the man described by the New Yorker as possibly "the most vital and eloquent composer in America," was shaking his groove thang to a cover of the Jackson 5's "I Want You Back."




Clearly, gala season is upon us.

Thursday's red-carpet rollout by the Los Angeles Philharmonic helped mark the start of the annual autumnal fundraising cultural swirl. It also signaled the growing

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artistic influence of the Phil's second-year music director, Gustavo Dudamel.

The Venezuelan conductor's pan-Latin sensibility was stamped all over the second half of Thursday's concert program, filled with orchestral standards such as Arturo Márquez's "Danzón No. 2" and sentimental favorites by the likes of Agustín Lara ("Granada"), sung by the red-hot

Peruvian tenor Juan Diego Flórez. ([Click here for music critic Mark Swed's review of the concert.](#))

"What you hear throughout is Gustavo really connecting with the orchestra, connecting with this orchestra in his way," said the Phil's board chairman, David Bohnett, making his way through the after-concert dinner party crowd.

This year's red-carpet glam quotient was somewhat lower than last year's, when Tom Hanks and spouse Rita Wilson topped the Hollywood marquee names in attendance.

This year actor Eva Mendes, former Disney chief Michael Eisner and billionaire philanthropist Eli Broad led the list of boldface names.

Another prominent change was the decor. At last year's gala the mise-en-scène was folkloric and the music was sleek and ultra-modern, showcasing the world premiere of Adam's angular, chiaroscuro-toned "City Noir."

Last year's affair featured a colorful mock-up of a provincial Venezuelan street scene. A stretch of Grand Avenue was transformed into a veritable [Barquisimeto](#) in miniature, and the glitterati dined on *camarones* and chimichurri and danced to a largely Latinate beat.

This year the pattern was reversed. The music was folkloric and the design palette was "raspberry, vanilla and black," infusing a confection of oversized baroque mirrors, Versace-esque backdrops and giant white balloon-shaped video screens suspended from the ceiling, the better to reflect the revelries.

On the dance floor below, Dudamel and his wife, Eloísa Maturén Dudamel, the gala's honorary chair, led the group gyrations to the party anthem "I Gotta Feeling" by the East L.A. pop/hip-hoppers the Black Eyed Peas. The feeling he had, Dudamel said, "is like I've been here for a life, and it's only one year." A few days ago, he and Maturén [announced that they are expecting their first child](#), a baby boy.

Nearby, Hancock, who holds the Phil's creative chair for jazz, chatted with one of his table guests, composer and longtime friend-of-the-Phil John Williams. Hours after the concert, Hancock was still jazzed about Flórez's bravura performance.

"Flórez, what a wonderful voice, and definitely he hit everything," said Hancock, stepping aside to allow an army of white-jacketed waiters carrying plates loaded with *Piemonti Di Gianduja* with hazelnut dacquoise (a.k.a. chocolate cake) and goat-milk ice cream to pass. "He's got a whole range of expression and he's a complete musician."

Starchitect Frank Gehry, seated at a next-door table, agreed that the concert program had ideally matched the occasion. "I thought it was perfect, the Latin thing," he said.

Deborah Borda, the Phil's president, announced to the cheering crowd that the event had raised \$3 million, which will help support the Phil-sponsored youth orchestra modeled on the Venezuelan national music training program that helped raise Dudamel from a working-class childhood to one of the world's most visible podiums. The upcoming season may further show how far he has come.

But for the moment there was only pleasure in celebrating what he and the Phil have achieved so far. There was a momentary lull when an ill-advised cover of Queen's draggy "Bohemian Rhapsody" practically cleared the dance floor. But soon the band lured the crowd back with ABBA's "Dancing Queen," sending waves of synthetic disco beats drifting into the cooling night.

-- Reed Johnson

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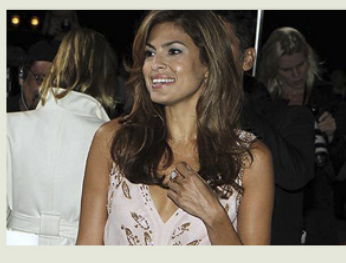
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
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
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Photo: Eva Mendes, top, and Herbie Hancock and wife Gudrun Mexines attend the Los Angeles Philharmonic's opening night gala Thursday. Credit: Kirk McKoy / Los Angeles Times

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