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Young Concert Artists, Inc.

JOSE FRANCH-BALLESTER, clarinetist

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Clarinetist Franch-Ballester goes global

By Lesley Valdes
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Astral Artistic Services inhabited a particularly global arena Sunday with an afternoon concert that drew a crowd that filled Trinity Urban Center to its walnut panels.

José Franch-Ballester was the recitalist. The handsome graduate of the Curtis Institute, from Moncofa, Spain, played clarinet in a program of 20th- and 21st-century works. Franch-Ballester's easy manner and playing made it all high art and highly entertaining. Debussy's Première Rhapsodie got the afternoon off to a fine start. Not a false note from this young man, whose control of line, nuance and hush are superior. His partner was Anna Polonsky at the piano.

Stravinsky's propulsive *L'histoire du soldat* (The Soldier's Tale) exists in many versions. A certain depth of bass is lost in the trio version for clarinet, violin and keyboard (Polonsky) performed on Sunday, though clarity is arguably gained. The very fine **Ida Kavafian** took the part of the fiddler who loses her soul to the devil. Kavafian also joined Ballester and the

exceptional marimba player Makoto Nakura for Kevin Puts' *And Legions Will Rise*, which Nakura commissioned for Kavafian's Angel Fire Festival in 2006. It proved this concert's heart, displaying momentum and melody.

The marimba burbles up and over the violin and clarinet; as the melodies sustain themselves, a tremendous tension envelops the listener. In remarks, Nakura pointed out that the composer was at a turning point. He had been writing in a minimal style and then took a neo-romantic turn. This piece reflected both influences.

Astor Piazzolla's *Concierto Aconcagua* for Violin, Cello, Clarinet and Piano was the nicely played finale. Tango masters will tell that you can't dance to nuevo tango, but if it's going as well as this, you'll be fooled into thinking you can. Nicholas Ong was the pianist, and Arnaud Sussmann joined on violin, Susan Babini on cello. Then a surprise: Franch-Ballester played a Bulgarian horas for encore with another Astral artist, Lidia Kaminska: one more global spin.