

Chausson concerto highlights fantastic program

By PATRICIA BEACH SMITH

If Ernest Chausson had lived any longer, he might have become more famous, assuming the sample of his work played at the American Artists Series concert Sunday, is any example.

Chausson's elegant and eloquent concerto for violin, piano and string quartet, was the highlight of the third of five AAS concerts this season at Kingswood School. Playing were soloists Misha Rachlevsky, violin and Joann Freeman, piano, along with the special guest The International Quartet from Indiana.

It came as no surprise to learn that Chausson was surrounded by the symbolist poets and impressionist painters. His music reflects every bit of the evocative emotionalism so much a part of that genre of thinkers.

Still, it is clearly wonderful composing from the intriguing orchestration to the thematic material — bits of sensual melodic elements enhanced by lush accompaniment. Both the soloists and their quartet were in fantastic shape for the event.

Mr. Rachlevsky seems particularly suited to playing music which allows for sensitivity with no inhibition, but which also calls for a disciplined technique.

TO COIN A PHRASE, Ms. Freeman had her hands full with Chausson's score for the piano. It seemed murderously athletic, but also beautiful. Perhaps because of the nature of the work, the International Quartet appeared to be a bit less stiff in their playing in the Chausson than in the concert's opening work, Brahms' ponderous Clarinet Quintet in B minor.

The opening movement of the Chausson was masterfully played and introduced most of the works' thematic material.

There was more than enough work for everyone in the first movement. However, the second movement revealed an interesting composition technique called "unison." The effect on this was dramatic contrast to the first movement which mostly relied on harmonies.

Yet, the third movement brought more dramatic contrast. The "grave" was played as called for and made this movement almost pathetic — even though it appeared to have been played beautifully.

Only in the fourth movement was there some uncertainty on the parts of the players. In its fury the third movement could, and did, lead the performers into fits of inaccuracy. It was quite a workout for all and in the end, more union passages pulled the whole thing together for a stunning finish. It was an attractive piece of music. Very grand and very appealing.

Julius Chajes' Sonata for Flute and

Review

Piano (which had its world premiere at this concert) was similarly charming and intriguing. Chajes, a Michigan resident, is an active composer.

The Flute and Piano Sonata was originally written for violin and piano. However, soloist Shaul Ben Meir, who played the work along with Chajes at the piano, convinced the composer that it would also make a nice flute piece.

He was correct. It appeared to be something that any excellent flutist might want to learn. It required an able player and one with a sense of humor, along with plenty of discipline. There was nice melodic material throughout, with major second intervals an important theme opener. There were very Baroque sounding composition mixed with interesting harmonic scale passages. Lots of counterpoint between the two instruments made it fun to listen to.

"If you like it, I wrote it," Chajes said. "If you don't like it, I'll remind you that Shaul asked me to make it for the flute."

Well, Ben Meir will not have to take the blame for anything, except being the one who coaxed Chajes into producing a marvelous new work for flute and piano.

The guest artists for the day, The International Quartet, opened the program with a very difficult work — Brahms' Clarinet Quintet in B minor. Compared to the other two works on the program, it plays emotionally, but it was very well, if dryly played by this young entourage.

Clarinetist David Shifrin will, no doubt, continue to rise on the music scene. His interpretation of the work

was to the point, academic and often brilliant, aided by his deft technique and sensitivity to his fellow quintet players.

The string quartet plays masterfully, but the tempo taken could have been a bit faster in some areas for this reviewer's taste, especially in the third movement. These four young players seem imbued with the "less is more" concept of playing and this understatement is very interesting.

It is obvious from this work of Brahms' that he knew exactly what to write for the clarinet to sound its best melancholy, ethereal self. Quite an event to hear it, too.



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