

Laredo performs with compelling impact

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

We may never recapture the atmosphere of chamber music the way it existed during the lives of the classical masters, but a Pro Musica event brings us as close as possible.

This series, which has been presented at the Recital Hall of the Detroit Institute of Arts for the past 60 years, consistently attracts the movers and shakers dedicated to art and culture.

Many of the events could have attracted a larger audience had a larger hall been chosen. However, that would have robbed the audience of the sense of the intimacy and closeness to the performing artist.



Avigdor Zaromp

Ruth Laredo's recent program there is a case in point. Laredo is, of course, internationally recognized for her performances and recordings of music by Rachmaninoff, Scriabin and Ravel. She started her studies with well-known Detroit teacher and performer Mischa Kottler, who was also in the audience.

We normally tend to associate Rachmaninoff's music with big

sound, forceful and robust passages combined with challenging technical demands. These, indeed, are elements that are almost always present in Laredo's approach. Much of it was present in most of the works by Chopin, Beethoven, Rachmaninoff, Ned Rorem and Ravel on this program.

IN THE THREE CHOPIN mazur-

kas, the grand approach was dominant. Her rubato would frequently put a disproportionate emphasis on the middle quarter of the bar, rather than the more subtle hint of other Chopin performers.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with her approach, however, it's compelling impact can't be denied. Those who heard her play the Tchaikovsky first piano concerto last summer in the hot, muggy and steamy Orchestra Hall are well aware that Laredo has technique and energy to spare.

The one item on this program in which the artistic element was noticeably deficient was Beethoven's Appassionata. The technique was

there, with very few misplaced notes. There was, however, an element of harshness. Beethoven's music is a combination of integrity and passion. Mostly the former was present in its physical form. In the concluding coda she pounded the fast chords ruthlessly, in spite of the indicated soft dynamics.

There was noticeable attachment to the Rachmaninoff and Ravel selections. Of the four prelude and two "Moment Musical" by Rachmaninoff, only the last prelude in G minor is familiar to most listeners.

THE PIANO VERSIONS of Ravel's "Valses Nobles et Sentimentales" and "La Valse" are less often heard than the orchestral versions

and the thick texture keeps the pianist rather busy. The sound was more late-Romantic than impressionistic much of the time, not much of a drawback in "La Valse" but more so in "Valses Nobles."

"Song and Dance" by Rorem, a knuckle breaker, was performed by Laredo the first time last year, she reported, on the day of the stock market crash. This may explain the more than 100 point drop in the Dow Jones last Thursday — it was all in anticipation of a knock-out performance.

Laredo played Debussy's "The Girl with the Flaxen Hair" as an encore to the audience, which gave her a standing ovation.

Quartet carries authenticity bit too far

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

How authentic is an authentic sound? This has baffled musicologists for generations. Many attempts have been made to recapture this elusive sound of past centuries. One step in this direction that seems natural is the use of authentic instruments.

One chamber group renowned for its exploration of the quality of authentic sound is the Salomon String

Quartet, which appeared at Orchestra Hall on the Chamber Music Society of Detroit (CMS) series. The musicians are violinists Simon Standage and Micaela Comberti, violist Trevor Jones and cellist Jennifer Ward Clark. Their instruments, in the order, are: Marius violin, Brescia, 1659; Italian violin (unspecified here), 1740; viola built by Rowland Ross in 1977 after Stradivarius, 1690; Amati cello, Bologna, 1730.

The items on the program were the Quartet Op. 77, No. 2 by Haydn,

review

Quartet No. 2, Op. 18 No. 2 by Beethoven and Quartet No. 13, Op. 29 D. 804 by Schubert.

Names such as Stradivarius and Amati are acknowledged for their high quality, and instruments made by such legendary craftsmen are worth a fortune today. But most

present day performers, even if they have such an instrument, use modern steel strings rather than gut, the practice before the mid-19th century.

The steel strings generate a sound that is more focused and more projecting than gut strings. Consequently, the sound of a Stradivarius

in today's performance isn't necessarily authentic in the strict sense.

The Salomon members, in their attempt to recapture the authentic sound, use strings that are at least close replicas of the originals.

The result is an overall sound that is much mellower, more subdued, but of a thicker texture than the characteristic modern sound. The desirability of its effect on the three works on this program is a matter of personal taste. I found the sound particularly suitable for the Haydn quartet. The Op. 77, No. 2 is Haydn's last quartet. Yet it still retains the intimate quality of 18th century chamber music within its aristocratic small halls. The minuet suggested the intimate kind of humor among friends.

Beethoven's Op. 18 No. 2, written around the same time (1799), like the Haydn work, was commissioned by Prince Lobkowitz. However, his work clearly signifies the beginning of a new stylistic period rather than the end of an old one.

As such, I didn't always find this performance in agreement with my personal preference, which should be

taken for what it is. The most positive aspect was that this performance let the intrinsic intensity of this masterpiece speak for itself. However, there were places where I wished the intrinsic quality had more support of the worldly kind. This was especially so in the final movement.

Schubert's quartet, with its many introverted passages, could have used some more extroverted singing in my opinion, especially in the second movement, featuring the theme from "Rosamunde."

The attempt to recapture the past is analogous to an excursion. For example, on Mackinac Island no motorized vehicles are allowed and many visitors enjoy tours in a horse-drawn carriage. But even the members of the Salomon Quartet wouldn't relish the idea of riding such a carriage all the way back to Orchestra Hall.

The Salomon Quartet offers a sound that is unique and rewarding to a point. An entire program of it, however, is too much for my contemporary ears. The fault may be, of course, with my ears rather than with the sound.

Musicae hosting benefit concert

Pianist Robert Conway and soprano Mary Irvine will be the guest artists at a benefit concert for the Birmingham Musicae at 4 p.m. Sunday at Varner Recital Hall, Oakland University, Rochester.

Proceeds from the concert, supported by Michigan Council for the Arts, will fund student musician scholarships, community orchestras, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and Federation of Music Club scholarships.

General admission is \$10 and patron and sponsor tickets also are available. A meet-the-artist reception will be held immediately after

the concert. For information, call 335-6317.

The program will include works by Mendelssohn, Brahms, Schubert, Debussy, Bolcom, Hindemith, Stravinsky as well as "Motivations" by Eugene Kurtz. Kurtz, an American composer living in Paris, is the visiting professor of composition at the University of Michigan. He will be present and will speak about his work. He has studied with Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud and Max Deutsch.

Schubert's work, "Der Hirt auf dem Felsen" for clarinet and piano, will feature guest artist Douglas Cornelison.

Conway has performed as soloist and chamber musician in major cities throughout the United States and Canada, earning his reputation with authoritative interpretations of the music of our time as well as masterpieces of the past.

As a featured artist with the Detroit Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, Sincere Sessions, the Breckenridge Music Institute of Colorado and others, he performs as a soloist and in chamber, symphony concerts and electronic music programs.

He also conducts master classes and lecture demonstrations. He is a native of Tulsa, Okla. with a bache-

lor's from the New England Conservatory of Music and graduate degrees from the University of Michigan.

Irvine, concert artist and oratorio soloist, is recognized as a sensitive interpreter of the art song. She was educated in the United Kingdom, has performed in England and Ireland, worked with the British Broadcasting Corporation and has performed widely in this area.

Locally, she had the role of Susanna in "The Marriage of Figaro" by Mozart, Castilda in "The Gossamer" by Gilbert and Sullivan and Fiona in "Brigadoon" by Lerner and Loewe.

French dancers celebrate spring

The International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit will be reclaimed by the French empire when the Madame Cadillac Dancers and Musicians take center stage to celebrate "Printemps a Paris" from 3-6 p.m. Sunday.

Artistic director Harriet Berg has choreographed a new set of dances for the group, which is the only performance company in America specializing in the French colonial period. The costumes, music and dances are authentic representations of the time when Detroit was a small outpost of France under the rule of Louis XIV.

Local Francophiles will get to see another side of distinguished Detroit actor Paul Winters — known as "the

golden voice of Channel 58" — when his original composition "Detroit, Mon Amour" debuts that afternoon. Winters, who has performed in the French streets of Detroit, from Livorno to Beaulieu. He also will sing a selection of French standards such as "J'attendrai" and "L'Importance d'être croule."

Pianist Evelyn Scheyer will play 17th and 18th century French music by Francois Couperin, Jean Baptiste

Lully and J. Ph. Rameau, along with music by Claude Debussy and Francis Poulenc. Scheyer has performed throughout the United States and Europe.

For a look at contemporary French theater, Gerald L. A. Smith, director of the Brecht Theater in Ann Arbor, and Bridget Wolf will

perform a scene from a Moliere play.

Tickets for "Printemps a Paris" are \$10 per person. The International Institute is located at 111 E. Kirby between John R and Woodward Avenue in Detroit's cultural center. For further information, call 871-8600.

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