

Music's past comes vividly to life

By Isabelle A. Smith
special writer

Baroque violinist Richard Luby has a vision. And a mission. His vision is to change the prevailing idea that original instrument performances are the province of pedantic, old, musicologists with long boards playing dull music on creaky, cranky old instruments by providing superb young performers in total artistic control who can play with a vibrancy and brio that captures the interest of modern audiences.

His mission: To make such performances available to the general public.

The second "Richard Luby and Friends" concert at Kingswood Auditorium last Saturday (Feb. 3), which featured Luby on the baroque violin and University of Michigan's Edward Parmentier on harpsichord, fulfilled the vision and made progress on the mission.

From the opening notes of Bach's Sonata in C Minor (BWV 1017), one knew that this would be a special evening. Except for a few difficulties with intonation early in the Sonata, the two artists displayed a wonderfully integrated sound, phrasing and accenting the music so that the contrapuntal voices reminded

one of a husband and wife who finish each other's sentences.

THE LISTENING EXPERIENCE is, indeed, different in original instrument performances. The melodic, less brilliant sound of a baroque violin sensually melts into the plucking of the harpsichord, only rising out of and above it as the melodic lines rise.

It is less the experience of hearing two distinct solo voices than it is of hearing two voices that seem to originate from one source. Luby and Parmentier had the ensemble skills to bring it off. Beautifully.

Next came that most courageous of artistic undertakings: the playing of an unaccompanied Bach solo work, in this instance the violin Partita #3 in E Major. Luby demonstrated here his total mastery both of music and instrument, clearly justifying the raves he has received throughout Europe and the U.S., with a performance of electric intensity. Who said there is no passion in a baroque performance?

He also expertly demonstrated many of the technical differences of baroque form modern music, shorter hand and arm movements, light or no chin support, less pressure on the strings and little vibrato, except for trills and ornamentation.

The result was a cascade of chang-

ing accents and shadings, of subtle shifts and rich harmonies effected for playing, for example, eighth notes unequally, subordinating certain grace notes and articulating phrases rather than connecting them.

What emerged is a Bach of perhaps less "majesty" and high drama but of more intimacy, clarity and — yes — elegance.

The different way of approaching ornamentation and rhythm in baroque performance of clean, rapid enunciation of intricate detail and exaggeration of structural and ornamental elements, clearly justifying beautifully in the works of Francois Couperin, that 18th Century genius of Gallic charm and subtlety.

As performed by Luby and Parmentier, Couperin's "Musical Portraits of Love" (in which dance movements are given titles for stages of courtship) was a courtly garden full of rhythmic and melodic poses — an early Valentine for lovers.

COUPERIN, HIMSELF, a keyboard virtuoso, placed great technical demands on performers of his compositions — especially on those who performed his solo harpsichord pieces, of which there are 240. Parmentier was more than equal to the challenge in Couperin's "Pleasures of Ceavecin." In fact, his command of the instrument is so solid that he created dynamic "color" and rhythmic variety in music often considered repetitive and uninteresting to modern audiences.

In his hands were conjured up tonal pictures of French court life. The sweep of a petticoat, the unfolding of a fan, the lifting of an eyebrow, all gestures denoting a world of romantic meaning in 18th century society, were brought vividly to life through Parmentier's artistry.

It was no surprise, then, that the program consisting of Bach Sonata in G Major with its amazingly varied contrapuntal melodies, often-daring harmonies and its internal balance and rhythmic contrasts, all impressively enunciated by Luby and Parmentier, brought the Kingswood audience to its collective feet. After prolonged applause and three curtain calls, they were besieged by well-wishers.

Clearly there is a growing audience for Baroque music performed on instruments of that era. And obviously Messrs. Luby and Parmentier know how to satisfy it.

The third and concluding "Richard Luby and Friends" concert will be performed at 8 p.m. on Saturday, May 5 at Kingswood Auditorium. Call 831-2870 for information.

Beethoven quartets rife with challenges

By Avigdor Zarnop
special writer

Of all the collections of string quartets written by a single composer, many people consider the 16 written by Beethoven to be the greatest monument to this form. Just about every distinguished chamber group grapples with their precipitous peaks with varying degrees of success.

The ranking of the Tokyo String Quartet among chamber groups may be analogous to the ranking of Beethoven's quartets. Titles such as the "Beats" are elusive and, in most instances, meaningless.

But if one were to draw an imaginary circle around such peaks, few would dispute the fact that Beethoven and the Tokyo Quartet belong inside the boundaries of their respective circles.

The Tokyo String Quartet was the latest group challenging the Beethovenian summit last Friday at Orchestra Hall. This was the beginning of the second half of the Chamber Music Society of Detroit (CMS) season. The three works on this program, Op. 18 No. 2, Op. 95 No. 11 and Op. 131, No. 14, provided a cross section of Beethoven's early, middle and late quartets.

Watching such an eminent group as the Tokyo scale these Beethovenian summits is, in some sense, more exciting than watching a suspense drama.

IN THE LATTER, the ending is predetermined and its outcome has no direct bearing on the life of the observer. In a musical performance, however, the listener becomes part of the evolution, provided the performance is sufficiently inspiring to draw the listener's attention and commitment.

This was definitely the case here. The early Op. 18 quartet, which owes much of its form to Haydn, emerged with uncommon richness and captivating attraction.

The rare attention to some of the viola and cello roles shifted the center of gravity, which is traditionally skewed in favor of the violins. Yet the freshness and playfulness came through with more vigor.

Among the yardsticks to measure an ensemble's quality is in the way it handles unison or octave passages. Such passages, being without internal harmonies to enrich the texture, leave that task up to the performers.

Met regional winner a surprise

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

Music competitions are very strange events. Often they become a tug of war between artistic merit and technical expertise. Is the singer's interpretation and stage presence superior to delivery or is technique more important?

Sunday afternoon at Rackham Auditorium where Detroit played host to the Great Lakes Regional Auditions for the Metropolitan Opera National Council, neither seemed important.

The event, sponsored by Macaebes Life Insurance Co. and Michigan Opera Theatre, included 10 outstanding finalists from Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit and Canada. The results were mystifying.

Linda Maguire, a 30-year old

American from Toronto, won the first place Mrs. Edgar Tobin Award of \$400 with non-descript, lackluster interpretations of "Enfin, je suis ici" from "Cendrillon" by Massenet and "Connais tu le pays" from "Mignon" by Thomas.

LAST YEAR when she was presented at the Music Hall in Detroit by the Canadian government and auditioned for MOT (but was never cast for anything), her performance was far more impressive. On Sunday afternoon, pronounced breathing marred her first selection. A smooth and seamless "Connais tu le pays" won the competition and a trip to New York for the finals for her.

Each singer chose the first piece from a repertoire of five arias. The judges chose the second number. In every case but one, the judges' selections enhanced the singer's overall performance.

The exception was the disappointment of the afternoon. Detroit's first place winner, Janet Williams, was asked to sing "Quel torrente che s'innalza" from "Giustino" by Handel, a role for which she garnered national attention in the U.S. premiere in San Francisco last year and should have sung well. Sunday, Williams was not in good voice and lost the competition. It was a pity. She is a significant talent.

The second- and third-place winners were more exciting than the first-place winner. Theresa Carol Williams, a 23-year old soprano from Cleveland, had a fairly secure technique in her "O quanto vate" by Bellini and Musetta's aria from "La Boheme" and an appealing artistic style and stage presence that dominated her singing.

THIRD-PLACE WINNER Susan Wallin, also from Cleveland, had some wrong notes in her "Queen of the Night" aria, but secure high F's. Her "Willow Song" from "Ballad of Baby Doe" brought back images of Cheryl Parrish's performance last year.

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