

CONCERT REVIEW



Thursday, April 17, 2008

Chamber players shine

By Stephen F. Leonard

GLENS FALLS - The deBlasiis Chamber Series continued its series of excellence Monday evening with the presentation of The Walden Chamber Players in concert at the Church of the Messiah.

The featured performers for the evening represent only four of the 13 concert artists of the group. Including performers on strings, piano and winds, the Chamber Players have a great flexibility of programming allowed to them by the many combinations of instrumentation. Viewing their present season's list of performances, it is clear that the Players offer a large variety of new music and music from the traditional repertoire.

The Monday performances explored trios and quartets by Mozart, Beethoven and contemporary composer Mario Davidovsky. No matter the composer or historical style, the performances were of the highest musical caliber.

The program offered several interesting takes on a typical chamber ensemble concert. Opening with two fugues by J.S. Bach from his "Well-Tempered Clavier," the twist came in the guise of the work being arranged for string trio by Mozart.

Motivated by suggestions from his benefactor, Mozart took the two Bach fugues and added two preludes of his own to create the larger work. The first prelude is unquestionably Mozart, while the second prelude is more in the style of Bach. Both sets worked well, especially with the expertise of the performers. Cellist Ashima Scripp was given a true workout not only in these works, but throughout the concert.

The "Quartet for Oboe and Strings in F" (KV37) was considered the first successful pairing of this instrumentation and genre. As explained by Christof Huebner on viola, there are very few other examples of such a pairing of oboe and strings in this form. Laura Ahlbeck on oboe in particular gave the audience what it has come to expect from the deBlasiis Series. The playing was magical.

A gem of programming came in the performance and general presentation of the "Quartetto No. 2 for Oboe and Strings" by Mario Davidovsky. In preparing the audience for what they were about to hear, Huebner not only gave a bit of background, but also looked towards an audience question- and-answer session immediately after the work was done.

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The work was played expertly. Intertwining melodic and harmonic textures, virtuosic technique and splendid musicianship once again combined for a more than satisfying performance.

After a short audience-performer discussion, Huebner asked the indulgence of the audience to allow the first section of the work to be encoed immediately. The second playing of the work truly allowed the audience to listen with a more open and educated ear -- not necessarily, however, changing previously held opinions of the work. Closing with the "String Trio in G Major, Op. 9, No. 1" by Beethoven, The Walden Chamber Players completed their first performance with the deBlasiis Series in spectacular fashion. I hope this performance will not be their last with the series.

The final concert in the deBlasiis Chamber Music Series will be at 7:30 p.m. May 12 in The Hyde Auditorium featuring cellist Regina Mushabac. For tickets and information, call 792-2383.