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Chamber Music Society delivers irresistible program

MUSIC REVIEW

By Joyce Tamer - Telegram & Gazette reviewer

Worcester received a Valentine Saturday in the form of a concert titled "For the Love of Music" presented by the Worcester Chamber Music Society in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit at Assumption College. The concert, an event of the Humanarts Program at the College, attracted a large and attentive audience and was to be repeated yesterday at the Museum of Russian Icons in Clinton.

The program was an interesting and varied selection of music from the 18th to the 20th centuries, including three seldom heard pieces and one jewel of the chamber music repertoire.

The Trio for Flute, Cello and Piano by Bohuslav Martinu, which opened the program, is a rhythmically complex piece that was given an incisive reading by the three musicians. The flute part was beautifully played by Tracy Kraus, displaying her technical prowess and gorgeous tone quality. Pianist William Ness navigated the challenging scale passages with ease and gave a spacious and elegant reading of the rhapsodic introduction to the second movement. David Russell's impressive cello playing completed the Trio.

Five regular members of the Worcester Chamber Music Society, Krista Buckland Reisner, Amy Rawstron, Mark Berger and Peter Sulski, were joined by four guest performers to form the chamber orchestra which paired with member-pianist Ian Watson for a performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto #13. They played with a sense of ensemble that made one think they play together regularly, and the exquisite phrasing and beautifully contoured phrases made this one of the highlights of the evening. Watson's brisk and light reading of the solo line was a delight, and his teasing approach to each repeat of the rondo theme in the third movement was wonderfully effective. The cadenzas were Mozart's, except for the one in the first movement, which was a successful Mozart-Watson collaboration.

The brilliant instrumentation and unusual tone colors of a full orchestra one usually associates with Ravel were condensed into the short song cycle, *Chansons madécasses*. Another trio of instruments, this time with pianist Jonathan Yasuda and cellist Jan Müller-Szerwas joining flutist Kraus, provided the accompaniment for soprano Maria Ferrante's vocal pyrotechnics. The first song in the cycle, *Nahandove*, is a seductive piece, made more so by the caressing repetition of the name in each verse. The second song in the cycle, *Auoa!*, a violent protest song with its piercing cries of *Auoa!*, required huge reservoirs of energy and breath support, and Ferrante delivered. The cycle ended with a languid and sensual performance of *Il est doux*.

The final piece on the program is one of the most highly regarded pieces in the chamber music repertoire, Mendelssohn's *Octet*. Mendelssohn, 16 years old at the time, conceived of writing a piece for a double quartet of four violins, two violas and two cellos; but he wrote a separate part for each instrument resulting, in his bold, sonorous and expansive *Octet in Eb*. Once again the fine musicianship of the individual players shone through in a brisk, high-energy performance. The audience showed appreciation for this truly gala evening of chamber music with a well-deserved sustained standing ovation.

The programming of the Worcester Chamber Music Society is so interesting and the playing is of such a high caliber that it is difficult to remember that three years ago, this group did not exist. Special commendation must be given to Peter Sulski and Tracy Kraus for creating and nurturing the group, which has added so much to the cultural life of Worcester.