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Chamber Music was a 'sold out' success in Clinton
By Jan Gottesman MANAGING EDITOR

CLINTON — Initially, it may have seemed like an odd match: The Worcester Chamber Music Society and Clinton. But with the 2008-2009 season almost complete, it seems the two have grown well together, using the Museum of Russian Icons as a launching point.

"The Worcester Chamber Music Society's hope has always been to bring live performances of high energy and quality to the doorstep of as many communities in the region as possible," said Peter Sulski, artistic director of the group "With the fantastic venue that is the Russian icon museum, we had a ready made partner. The Russian icon museum reflects our ethos, which is to bring international quality to a small community. We had no expectations except to put out a lot of energy and hope for good results in terms of audience support."

And those expectations were met "completely," Sulski said.

"Audience enthusiasm has been extremely high and open to all of our varied repertoire. All of our concerts were performed to capacity crowds, selling out the last two shows," he said.

Sulski credited the staff of the museum with helping to achieve the society's goals.

"With Kent Russell and his staff's help, we've worked very hard to combine the needs of both institutions, playing music in a museum full of priceless artifacts. We've been pleased with the results. The museum is a magical place," he said.

Russell said the series has been a success from the museum's point of view, also.

"Each and every concert has been filled to capacity," Russell said. "The reviews have been excellent. Our audiences have been raving about the quality of the music and the extraordinary range of the program."

Crowds came not only from Clinton and surrounding towns, but also Worcester, Auburn, Shrewsbury and Boston. The series has become a victim of its own success, in a way, Sulski said.

"Our audience numbers have been so good that we have outgrown the space. I feel that we have drawn an audience from the local area, which is our focus, but also people who wanted to hear the concert again (after hearing it in Worcester), and still others from outside the area altogether who wanted to combine hearing the concert with seeing the museum," he said. "Our audience, generally speaking, shows quite a mix of chamber music awareness, from the uninitiated and curious, to some folks who might come because they enjoy a particular piece. However, all that matters to any of our musicians is that an audience is receptive to our intense emotional energy in presenting this fantastic music. I feel that enthusiasm has been more than reciprocated. Everyone who is present during a concert – musicians, staff, and audience alike – is making an investment to come out of the comfort of their homes and invest in each other and the event. We are each others' greatest resource."

The Worcester Chamber Music Society will be moving three of its 2009-2010 concerts from the museum to nearby St. John's Church. In addition, a family concert will be held.

"Even since I first played there 10 years ago, it has been a dream of mine to help make some chamber music happen on a regular basis. Father Walsh has been wonderfully open to our proposal and will be opening up the church to us on Nov. 20, Feb. 14, and May 16, 2010 as well as March 7 for a family concert called 'Meet the Composer.' The side galleries and sumptuous acoustic should be a real treat for our audience.

“Our season opener in the area will take place at the Unitarian Church in Harvard on Sept. 25, and we will also play there on Jan. 17,” Sulski said.

If you did not get a chance to see the Worcester Chamber Music Society perform this season, there is still a chance. The final performance will be Sunday, May 17, beginning at 3 p.m., in the Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, following a performance in Worcester the night before.

Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$15 for seniors and \$10 for students.

“Our final concert of the season will feature some wonderfully varied repertoire with music from Austria, Spain, China and the United States,” Sulski said. “Our resident soprano, Maria Ferrante, will present some wonderful songs by the American composer William Bolcolm, guest artist Xue Mei will sing three Chinese folk songs, resident composer/violist Mark Berger will present his string trio and guest Kathleen Corcoran, guitar, will perform the hauntingly beautiful ‘Sephardic Songs’ by Spanish composer Manuel Valls. The program will culminate in a performance of Schubert’s ‘Trout’ Quintet, for violin, viola, cello, double bass, and piano, a chamber music gem.”

Sulski said that in addition to a successful partnership with the Museum of Russian Icons, the society has formed an alliance with the schools.

“Just as important as our goal of presenting great concerts for enthusiastic audiences, is the development of a vibrant concert culture, which can be created by investing in our young musicians. The Clinton public schools have wonderful music programs, and our present and future collaborations with the dedicated full-time teachers and their students is of vital importance to us,” Sulski said. “In these changing times, we feel what we have to offer is more important than ever before in terms of community development. Investing in our youth is what builds communities.”

The Worcester Chamber Music Society will also present a summer festival in Lancaster this July.