



Libertyville Review

Classical Review: Areyzaga shines in Pilgrim Chamber Players program

BY DOROTHY ANDRIES | Classical Music Critic February 20, 2013 5:02PM

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The Pilgrim Chamber Players presented "Winter Song" the afternoon of Jan. 27 in the Highland Park Community House. The star of the show was undoubtedly soprano Michelle Areyzaga. Despite a predicted ice storm, her fans filled the audience, alongside the devoted followers of this durable chamber music series, now in its 16th season.

The highly popular singer presented three sets of songs, two in Spanish — "Tres Poemas de Gabriela Mistral" by Wayland Rogers and "Suite for Soprano and Violin" by Hector Villa-Lobos, as well one in English — "The Life of the Bee," for Soprano, Cello and Piano by Lee Hoiby.

Chile's Mistral was the first Latin American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

"I first heard her poetry in Mexico," said Rogers, in his remarks to the audience. "I knew I had to set it to music."

Pianist Carol Honigberg, founder and director of the ensemble, provided an artful touch to the program. Before the performance of each set, actress Alicia Hall read the poems in English, even Hoiby's, which were written in English. It was a welcome addition.

Honigberg was at the piano, providing Rogers evocative accompaniment to Areyzaga's shining voice. The soprano is also a confident and talented interpreter. In the second song, when assuring a child of the reality of guardian angels, she was every bit the tender mother, and in the last song, "Close to Me," she could break your heart.

Hoiby's "Bee" songs to poems by Jeffrey Beam, were accompanied by Honigberg and cellist David Cunliffe, and they were comical, as the name suggests. Of course the soprano was the queen bee, with all the requisite affectation that status confers. No surprise — Cunliffe's cello buzzed frequently, and when the stingers were represented, the song was briefly as menacing as any Edgar Allan Poe poem.

Areyzaga was particularly at home in the Villa-Lobos folk songs, using her full, flexible voice to navigate the numerous tra-li-las and vocalise.

The instrumental numbers included Honigberg and Cunliffe playing "From the World of My Father" by Herman Berlinski, who fled to the United States when the Nazis swept through Europe.

The piece abounds in Hasidic melodies, some mournful, some, like the Wedding Dance, more wistful than sad. At times the piano sounded as if crystal was being broken.

The work has been included in the prestigious Milken Archive of Jewish Music, and Honigberg and her son, cellist Steven Honigberg have recorded the music on the Albany Records label.

The finale was Trio Pathetique for Violin, Cello and Piano by Michael Glinka. Joining Honigberg and Cunliffe was violinist Michele Lekas. This was marked by superior playing from all three, with glistening piano phrases and sweet harmonies from the strings.

Once again, Honigberg has given us an afternoon to remember, deftly playing the piano in all but one number on the program.

Pilgrim Chamber Players' next concert will be at 3 pm. March 17 at the Highland Park Community House, 1991 Sheridan Road, Highland Park. Titled "String Fantasy," it features a Trio by Allen Krantz for guitar, played by Adam Levin, William Knuth violin, and Steven Honigberg, cello. For tickets visit www.pilgrimplayers.org or call (847) 433-0992.

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