

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Click here to return to previous page](#)

Article published Oct 18, 2011

Chamber Music Society unveils some rare gems MUSIC REVIEW

By Joyce Tamer TELEGRAM & GAZETTE REVIEWER

In a daring and ultimately delightful choice of programming, the Worcester Chamber Music Society presented a concert entitled "From the Shores of Britain" on Sunday afternoon at the Worcester Art Museum. Held in the gallery of 16th-century European art, the concert featured works by five composers, four of whom were modern and relatively unknown. Any qualms about hearing a program of fairly obscure 20th-century composers were soon put to rest by a beautifully performed concert of accessible and thoroughly enjoyable music.

Henry Purcell was the only familiar name on the program, and his works opened both the first and second half of the concert. The first set of Purcell works were three Fantasias for violin, viola and cello; three other Fantasias for string trio plus flute were performed after intermission. All were polyphonic in style and each Fantasia was composed of several sections of different tempi and character. Most surprising were the unusual harmonies which were used, particularly in the Fantasias for four instruments. These compositions were unlike most of Purcell's music, which might be familiar to audiences. They were given a compelling reading by the group.

After the Purcell, there was a leap of almost 200 years to the other composers represented on the program. This gap, of course, reflects the lack of any significant British composers in the period between Purcell and Benjamin Britten.

However, unknown riches awaited the audience as the Society presented music from three female composers. First was Hilary Tann, a Welch composer who has a body of work of more than 75 pieces and whose music is influenced by a love of nature and the music of Japan. In fact, the piece "Llef" — which we were told translates as "A Cry from Heaven" — was originally written for cello and shakuhachi, a Japanese end-blown bamboo flute, the latter instrument having been studied by Tann for six years.

Tracy Krauss played her modern flute instead of the Japanese instrument, and was joined by David Russell on cello. Hauntingly beautiful melodies were interrupted by impassioned cries from the flute, and tonal contrasts were provided by unusual bowings on the cello.

Judith Weir, an oboist as well as a composer, has composed an extensive portfolio of works for strings and piano based on folk music of the British Isles. She was represented by "The Bagpiper's String Trio," a composition that was originally written as a duet for clarinet and piano. In that version each of the three movements featured a different register of the clarinet. In the version the Society presented, each of the movements — "Salute," "Nocturne" and "Lament, Over the Sea" — featured one of the string instruments. Russell was joined by Rohan Gregory and Mark Berger in a penetrating performance.

During intermission, James Welu, director of the Worcester Art Museum, related the story of how the only 16th-century English painting in the museum's collection, which hangs in the gallery where the concert was held, came to be acquired. The work is a 1563 portrait of John Farnum by Steven von der Mueler, and the painting was purchased by the museum from descendents of the Farnum family some 400 years after the portrait was completed.

After the second group of Purcell Fantasias, the second half of the program continued with "Lullaby and Grotesque," a two movement piece for viola and cello by Rebecca Clarke. Clarke has a connection to Massachusetts, in that one of her compositions was a runner-up in a contest in the Berkshire Festival of Chamber Music, which was sponsored by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. In "Lullaby," Berger and Russell alternated between playing a lovely, lyrical extended melody and adding embellishment. "Grotesque" was in marked contrast with heavy accents and pizzicato and spiccato playing.

The final piece, a string trio in four movements, was by Ernest John Moeran. This piece, as everything on the program, was played with elegance, beauty and attention to detail.

The audience took great pleasure in hearing so many new and enjoyable pieces played so well, and responded with a lengthy standing ovation. Special thanks are due to the museum for instituting these enchanting afternoons of music in the galleries.

Order the Telegram & Gazette, delivered daily to your home or office! www.telegram.com/homedelivery

Copyright 2011 Worcester Telegram & Gazette Corp.