

Concert review: Worcester Chamber Music Society delights at Assumption

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WORCESTER - On Friday night, the Worcester Chamber Music Society presented its final mainstage performance of the season at Assumption College's Curtis Performance Hall. Although the program was presented under the title "Censored Identity" — concerned as it was with composers threatened, at one time or another, by totalitarian regimes — knowing of those contentious histories made us all the more aware of how fortunate we were to hear this music in such an open, heartfelt context.

The concert concerned itself with three kinds of action. Sofia Gubaidulina's *Garden of Joy and Sorrow* opened with videographic clarity. Composed in 1980 for flute (Tracy Kraus), viola (Peter Sulski) and harp (Franziska Huhn), it came across as both childlike and mature, combining those two states of being by virtue of the Russian composer's penchant for evocation.

With characteristic attention to detail, the piece took as inspiration texts by Iv Oganov (biographer of Eastern storyteller Sayat-Nova) and Francisco Tanzer, both of which, through Gubaidulina's spiritual filter, correlated the nature of music with the music of nature. It began with harmonics from the viola circling around the harp's glissandi (the latter produced by sliding the tuning key up and down a string) while the flute carved its paths through very air. Some moments felt like rain dropping from leaves, others the stirrings of insect and mammalian life or even shifts of light and shadow. Subsequent phases revealed more and more of a vastly internal ecosystem, leading to tactile narration of Tanzer's incarnate poetry itself.

In the wake of this photorealistic introduction, Felix Mendelssohn's *Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor* of 1839 represented not only a step back in time but also a leap forward in form. Over the course of four distinct yet jigsaw-flush movements,

Krista Buckland Reisner (violin), David Russell (cello) and Randall Hodgkinson (piano) proceeded like theatrical actors, connecting every lyrical thread from start to finish to create a flowing and lyrical tapestry.

Their ability to enhance the seemingly innate characteristics of the score spoke of a deep emotional commitment to every note. This was especially true of the second movement, in which violin and cello emoted like singers engaged in romantic duet across a stage cleared by the piano, and the vivacious finale, which elicited a veritable wonderland of color.

In light of these selections, Erich Wolfgang Korngold's Piano Quintet in E Major (1921) came across as a decidedly cinematic companion. Between its resplendent, sunlit outer movements, each of which sported their own beauties, beat the heart of the concert's highlight: the lush and sometimes-haunting Adagio. With the addition of violinist Rohan Gregory, it came across as a song without words, folding in on itself without remorse. Given the contrast of its melodramatic surroundings, its effect was far from lost on a rapt audience. All of which served to remind us that identities, however censored, are evolving things, shifting through space and time and inviting us as communities to enliven their messages, however hidden.