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Music Worcester-Chamber Society performance truly is 'Enchanted Music'

MUSIC REVIEW

By Joyce Tamer TELEGRAM & GAZETTE REVIEWER

In a new and fortuitous partnership, Music Worcester and the Worcester Chamber Music Society presented "Enchanted Music" Friday evening at the Grafton Congregational Church. Randall Hodgkinson joined the members of the Society in a program which was to be repeated on Saturday evening at Tuckerman Hall.

In a challenging trio of works by Franck, Shostakovich and Weber, the Society demonstrated once again its consummate musicianship and prodigious technique.

The Piano Quintet in F Minor by César Franck was the focus of the pre-concert lecture, and ostensibly, as the last item on the program, was meant to be the highlight of the evening. It is a large, sprawling work, which uses chromatic harmonies, frequent modulations, surprising harmonic progressions, and extremes of dynamics. Franck's use of cyclical form, so familiar from his D Minor Symphony, helped to unify the various movements of the piece. Rather than enchanting, this quintet is passionate and dramatic; and the musicians gave it a wonderfully romantic reading with huge crescendos, dramatic silences, and wonderful little swells and sighs. The audience literally was swept to its feet at the conclusion.

Shy and reserved, Dmitri Shostakovich was alternately praised and condemned by the Soviet government. To please government censors he wrote music to glorify the motherland, but in his later years he also wrote "private music" that reflected his inner feelings. His 15 string quartets are examples of these intensely private compositions. The autobiographical String Quartet No. 8, composed in three days in the summer of 1960, uses the letters DSCH, (which translate musically as DEbCB) as a unifying motif throughout the movements of the quartet. Krista Buckland Reisner, Rohan Gregory, Peter Sulski and David Russell gave a stunning performance of this emotional piece which was the highlight of the evening for this reviewer. They played with a luminous tone, a balanced blend of voices and a sustained, intensely emotional character. The frenzied second movement was especially effective with its mounting tension, and the grotesque little dance-like third movement was particularly "enchanting."

The Trio for Flute, Cello and Piano by Carl Maria von Weber, less overtly Romantic than the Franck or the Shostakovich, opened the program. It is a charming piece, which gives each of the three instrumentalists an opportunity to shine, which Tracy Kraus, Joshua Gordon and Randall Hodgkinson all did, navigating the virtuosic passages with ease. The rapid scale-like duet passages between flute and piano were marvelously coordinated, as were the "conversations" between the piano and cello. Stylistically, I would have preferred a more light-hearted approach, but the trio's interpretation was nevertheless compelling.

Randall Hodgkinson, guest artist, was an excellent addition to the group. He plays musically, with sensitive phrasing and technical fluency. There were times during the Weber Trio that forte passages in the piano nearly overpowered the flute and cello; it will be interesting to hear how that balance is maintained using the large grand piano in Tuckerman Hall.

This program concludes another successful season for the WCMS. Its other projects in the community – Neighborhood Strings, Symphonic Project, Café Concerts, and the new collaboration with Music Worcester — speak to its vision and its commitment to the musical life of the community. It is hoped that the musical riches the Society provides and the success it has achieved will continue well into the future.

