

Review: Chiara members open Sheldon Friends season

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By John Cutler

The season-opening concert for the Sheldon Friends of Chamber Music was an opportunity for patrons to hear two Chiara Quartet members in a different setting.

The world premiere of Robert Sirota's "Pange Lingua Sonata" was the central showpiece. Bach and Brahms surrounded the premiere. Joining Chiara violinist Hyeyung Julie Yoon and cellist Gregory Beaver was Soyeon Kate Lee, winner of the 2010 Naumberg Piano Competition.

Yoon and Lee opened with a J.S. Bach "Sonata in C Minor" in which it seemed Yoon spun romantic interpretations into the phrases of the first and third movements. This pleased patrons almost as much as Yoon's coquettish treatment of the allegretto second movement.

Lee became involved quickly with the counterpoint and exhibited good transitions between Bach's continuo-like accompaniment for parts of the work and his equal-weighted countermelodies throughout the piece.

The Sirota work is in three movements. The last is a treatise on a 14th century hymn in the Phrygian mode. A curtain of sound from violin and piano required close cooperation between the musicians, a task that appeared not easily accomplished, nonetheless handsomely presented.

Emotions are front and center in the work's second movement, and it was clear both Yoon and Lee were pouring their souls into it. In a display of excellent composition, violin followed piano at several instances with a pleasing cascade of linked phrases.

Patrons came to their feet as composer Sirota went to the stage and embraced Lee and Yoon. It was a masterful evocation for the highly accessible piece.

The Brahms was a crowd-pleaser, too. Beaver joined Lee and Yoon for the "Piano Trio in C Major, Opus 87," and their playing settled in to a fresh approach on this old favorite.

The growing Chiara maturity was apparent in the cello and violin treatment of opening octaves for the second movement. Lee sensed the electricity in all this and applied extreme grace and poise to her keyboard approach.

By the middle of the fourth movement finale, the trio's machinery was running perfectly. The work received a triumphant rendering, and the Friends' season got off to a rousing success.

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