

Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players

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Carrying On A Conductor's Quixotic Tradition

When the iconoclastic conductor Jens Nygaard founded the Jupiter Symphony in 1979, he established an ideal programming recipe. Standard repertory works performed by young musicians, often with a name soloist, would be the immediate draw. But the programs would also include 19th- and early 20th-century rarities heard virtually nowhere else. The oddities quickly became the main reason to attend the orchestra's performances, as Nygaard no doubt hoped they would. The ensemble was so thoroughly steeped in Nygaard's personality that when he died in September 2001, it seemed unlikely the group would survive.

But that expectation didn't take into account the tenacity and drive of Mei Ying, Nygaard's companion, or the loyalty of some of the players who worked with him. Determined to keep Nygaard's work (and memory) alive, Ms. Ying has continued raising money for a scaled-down version of the group -- the Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players -- and presenting its performances at the Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, on West 66th Street.

The ensemble's program on Monday afternoon was very much in Nygaard's signature style, and the size and enthusiasm of the audience suggested that his vision still has a constituency. The most ambitious of the program's novelties was Max Bruch's Septet, a student work scored for the peculiar combination of two violins, cello, bass, clarinet, horn and bassoon.

The first of its four movements was not promising: a lot of descending scales (and later, ascending ones) suggested that Bruch's lyrical gift lay in the future. But the future came quickly. **In both the Scherzo and the finale, nicely turned melodies, interesting modulations and spirited ensemble interplay kept things lively.**

Better still, for both its concision and its shapeliness, was a Hummel Trio, played with warmth and precision by Inga Kapouler, pianist, Barry Crawford, flutist and Chagit Glaser, cellist. The soprano Christine Goerke joined in for the third novelty, a group of beautiful harmonizations of Scottish songs by Weber, the most memorable of which was a setting of "The Happy Soldier," with its folkishly simple melody and accompanying string writing suggesting a military band.

Ms. Goerke also sang two Schubert chestnuts, "The Shepherd on the Rock," with Vadim Lando giving a lovely account of the clarinet line and Ms. Kapouler at the piano, and "Erlkönig," in which Ms. Goerke and Ms. Kapouler gave a performance that was finely nuanced and thoroughly menacing.

-- Allan Kozinn