

Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players

give an innovative program for piano, winds, strings and soprano

Review of Jupiter Concert September 26, 2011

Baton Versus Pen

by Harry Rolnick

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Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 West 66th Street
September 26, 2011 (7:30 pm)

Arturo Toscanini: *Two Songs: "Nevrosi" & "Son Gelosa"*

Felix Weingartner: *Octet in G Major* for clarinet, horn bassoon, two violins, viola, cello and piano, Opus 73

Gustav Mahler: *Piano Quartet in A minor*

Jens Nygaard: *Cadenza, for Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24, K. 491*

George Szell: *Piano Quartet in E Major*

Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players: Vadim Lando (Clarinet), Gina Cuffari (Bassoon/Soprano), Karl Kramer (French horn), Misha Vitenson, Lisa Shihoten (Violins), Mark Holloway (Viola), Mihai Marica (Cello), Michael Brown (Piano)

The great surrealist novelist Flann O'Brien once wrote an essay proving beyond logical doubt that conductors not only didn't need to read music or know the work they were conducting, but they *didn't need to know anything about music at all*.

Most orchestral musicians would agree.

Okay, conductors not only understand music, but a rare few actually write music which stands the test of time. The obvious trio would be Mahler, Bernstein and Boulez. Yet, just as the comic wants to do tragedy, many a conductor feels his true path to greatness is *creating* rather than *re-creating*.

And the Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players, in their quest to find little-known music, utilizing the best chamber players to attempt the unknown, offered a special opportunity yesterday, with two performances (their usual 2pm and 8pm) of music written by full-time conductors.

Three of the conductors worked in the early part of the 20th Century, and their works were certainly conservative, but often surprising. I speak especially of the first work, two songs written by the young Toscanini in 1885, *Neurosis* and *I am jealous*. One expected Verdi-like arias, but the dramatic soprano Gina Cuffari showed a Toscanini who obviously related more to German music. Both songs could have been written by Robert Schumann, both offered a passion and line which never touched Italy. And in the second song, several measures had a chromatic slip and slide which could only have been Wagnerian.

Her accompanist, Michael Brown, played in all five works, but his only solo—a cadenza written for pianist William Wolfram, by the founder of the Jupiter Symphony, Jens Nygaard—showed what a limpid, beautifully controlled artist he is. Mr. Nygaard's cadenza flowed down Mozart lanes and paths, each with beautiful backgrounds. And at the very end, Mr. Nygaard brought forth that martial major theme, like an unexpected gift.

We had two ensemble pieces, both showing the personalities of their conductor-composers.

Felix Weingartner considered himself a composer more than a conductor, but alas, nobody seems to have heard the 72 works preceding this Opus 73. Of course it is written beautifully, for low strings, piano and low winds, but the style could only be called hybrid.

The two middle movements were basically Brahms resurrected. The slow movement had some fine variations, the minuet wasn't further advanced. But the opening movement had all the luscious flavor of the very late romantic era, more Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* than the advanced music written when he composed this, in 1925. The finale was a deliciously eccentric march theme, taking conservative liberties, though nothing more advanced than Richard Strauss.

George Szell's *Piano Quartet* could have been written for his own enjoyment. It was Brahmsian, pure and simple, composed with total fluency, utter craftsmanship. One could almost hear the Maestro—who had apparently mastered every instrument in the orchestra—saying to his colleagues, "Well, do you want me to take the piano part? The violin? The viola? The cello?"

I save the best for last. *Not* the music, though. Mahler's piano quartet, written in 1875, is predictably passionate, lyrical and the work of a fervent, almost demon-ridden composer.

The ominous first theme, though, was somewhere in my memory. And then I recalled that Martin Scorsese—a film director who will go to the ends of the earth for the right music—used the Mahler in his movie *Shutter Island*.

Gustav might have scorned being "used" for a mere "flicker" (as the movies were called in his time), but his thoughts sung in the Scorsese as much as in Visconti's *Death in Venice*.

Mahler in that film was paired up with Feldman, Ligeti, Cage, Penderecki, John Adams, Dinah Washington and others to produce the emotion Scorsese needed for this thriller. I used to think that Kubrick and Mike Nichols were the masters in finding the perfect music for their films. But Scorsese, ever the perfectionist, has uncovered as much rare music as Jupiter Symphony itself.