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LIFE & ARTS

MUSIC REVIEW : Musicians of Ma'alwyck offer interesting mix to start season

BY GERALDINE FREEDMAN For The Daily Gazette SCHENECTADY — Ann-Marie

Barker Schwartz, the violinist and director of Musicians of Ma'alwyck, always comes up with something different to entice

people to come to the group's concerts. In MOM's season opening concert on Friday at the First Reformed Church, Barker Schwartz chose to celebrate the 300 years of Maalwyck, the house where she lives, which was built in 1712, along with compositions that spanned that period.

It was an interesting mix for which Barker Schwartz provided tidbits of information to the small but enthusiastic crowd. Helping her were pianist/composer Thomas Savoy, cellist Petia Kassarova, fl utist Norman Thibodeau, soprano Anne Agresta Dugan and baritones Charles Schwartz and Jonathan Estabrooks.

All the pieces were fairly short and there was no intermission. Kassarova and Savoy performed the second movement of Brahms' Cello Sonata No. 1 in E minor. Written in 1862 when Brahms was 29, it's very untypical sounding with the piano having most of the work to the cello's commentary. It was light, very lyrical, almost airy.

Barker Schwartz said the amateur cellist who premiered the work complained about not being able to be heard. Even with Kassarova's professional touch, having her play in her low register against a busier piano playing in the treble range were not the greatest ensemble choices. Maybe Brahms was experimenting.

The world premiere of Savoy's "Songs for Jack" with the excellent Estabrooks was an eloquent amalgamation of musical expression with five of John Cromie's often poignant poems. Cromie died three years ago at age 37. A few of his family were in the audience. Kassarova provided a pleasing few lines in two of the poems.

Estabrooks sang with a robust, ringing voice that was elegantly controlled. Phrases were fluid and finished and his diction was excellent. As is the fashion these days, his lines were abstract and the piano's harmony was chromatic, slightly dissonant and sometimes unresolved. But Savoy caught each poem's quality and intent to make for satisfying results.

Thibodeau played Debussy's "Syrinx," an iconic work for solo flute (1912). He took a contemplative approach to linger.

Barker Schwartz played two rarities, both written for Maud Powell, a 19th century violin superstar: Marion Bauer's "Up the Ocklawaha" and Harry Gilbert's "Marionettes." Everyone joined in for five selections from the 18th century hit "The Poor Soldier" by William Shield, which Brett Wery orchestrated so cleverly. Also performed were two Handel arias and three of Thomas Arne's songs from "Artaxerxes" (1762).

MOM's next concert is Nov. 4 at the Schuyler Mansion in a program of 18th century music.

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