

# Fabulous Bridgehampton Finales

BY DAVID SWICKARD

The Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival closed last weekend, and, from the concerts I heard, it was eminently successful on all fronts.

Marya Martin, its director and principal flutist, Ken Davidson, chairman of the board, Anne Taibleson, executive director, and all of the performers made this summer season one of the best ever. And the Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church, with its wonderful acoustics, air-conditioning, and cushioned pews, was the perfect venue.

Like the best masters of the art of chamber music, the organizers seem to know that less is more. The format provided concerts of different styles, different purposes and lengths, which were perfect summer fare.

The Wednesday and weekend evening concerts had particular themes — dramatic design, unusual contemporary composers, and dance music, for example, and the composers included immortal geniuses like Mozart, Bach, Schubert, and Brahms. The shorter concerts on Tuesday afternoons were dedicated to teaching young people some secrets of musical composition and form.

So, on Aug. 14, my wife and I took our 10-month-old son to his first concert. Admittedly, he was a bit young to get much out of it and instead enjoyed playing on the church vestibule floor with William Fleming, a member of the festival's board.

The hourlong program was led by David Wallace, a teaching artist, who explained why chamber music is called chamber music with the help of some musical illustrations by a 15-year-old piano prodigy, Joyce Yang. Mr. Wallace expressed such joy in talking about his subject matter that even the most reluctant child could easily buy into the presentation.

Finally, like all well-organized not-for-profit ventures, the festival was graced by a few fund-raising events, beginning with a benefit at the Atlantic Golf Club and ending with a memorial concert at Channing Daughters Winery.

The latter event, on Friday, was a moving memorial to Brian Little, a longtime supporter of the festival. The performers rose to the occasion, giving a charming and well-ordered interpretation for string quartet of Johann Pachelbel's Canon and Gigue in D major, one of Mr. Little's favorite pieces. (The short and vivacious Gigue was added by Pachelbel to create a rarely heard mini-suite, although the canon itself has become familiar through continuous repetition.)

Especially notable were the flowing lines of Adela Pena's violin passages. Melissa Meell's cello gave a firm grounding and thoughtful sonority to the work as a whole, while Philip Setzer, violin, and Scott St. John, viola, gave their usual superb performances.

The second work on the program, Gareth Farr's "Kembang Suling" for flute and marimba, subtitled "Three Musical Snapshots of Asia," was a daring touch for an evening with wine and a sunset as distractions.

The unusual instrumentation provided an opportunity for both performers, Ms. Martin on flute and Makoto Nakura on marimba, to wrench the most from their instruments. Mr. Nakura's spectacular technical virtuosity was given a broad canvas in the first movement, based on Balinese gamelan melodies, and in the last, comprised of the rhythms and scales of South Indian music. The speed and precision of his strike was amazing to behold, forcing reflections on the cross-cultural implications of having a Japanese perform a work by a New Zealand composer

incorporating Asian rhythms on a Latin American instrument of African derivation.

Ms. Martin's playing gave a wonderful reproduction of the timbre and tonalities of the Japanese shakuhachi flute on a Western instrument. It effectively presented the mystery of an Asian landscape in our mind's eye. Indeed, her interpretation was so moving that in her hands this composition could join those Japanese compositions for solo shakuhachi venerated as aids to meditation. This work, with these performers, cries for a music video.

The evening ended with a brilliant performance of a rather mundane Tchaikovsky sextet for two violins, two violas, and two cellos, misleadingly titled "Souvenir of Florence" Op. 70.

Having just returned from a trip that included a week in Florence, I searched in vain for any Tuscan sensibility. However, this superb sextet of players, each of whom is a stellar performer in his or her own right, made an Italianate silk purse of what might otherwise be a Slavic sow's ear. I especially noted the rich and mellow articulation of Ms. Meell's cello, while Cynthia Phelps was so in tune with the work that she seemed to understand it better than the composer himself.

And, as the last bars of the allegro vivace died away, I saw the mist of evening gathering over the fields of Bridgehampton and thought, "This must be what heaven is like." I believe that Brian Little would have said the same thing.

The East Hampton Star,

August 23, 2001



KIRSHBAUM DEMLER & ASSOCIATES, INC.

711 WEST END AVENUE SUITE 5KN NEW YORK NY 10025

212 222 4843 TEL 212 222 7321 FAX WWW.SKASSOC.COM

Press Representation