

CityMusic Cleveland: “Symphonie Concertante” (Sept. 21)

by Kevin McLaughlin



The concert by CityMusic Cleveland on Thursday, September 21 in Fairmount Presbyterian Church was a reminder of two things: that there is an abundance of appealing music yet to be heard or played out, and there are exceptional performers in Cleveland ready to play it. The consistently splendid CityMusic (now in its twentieth year) maintained its high standard with a program of infrequently heard works by George Walker, Joseph Bologne, Tōru Takemitsu, and W.A. Mozart, aided by guest solo violinists Kyung Sun Lee and Jung-Min Amy Lee (*pictured at another venue*).

Walker’s *Lyric for Strings* has the quiet solemnity of Barber’s famous *Adagio for Strings*, and like that piece, it started life as the second movement from an early string quartet. Walker added the title *Lament* (later *Lyric for Strings*) and dedicated it as an elegy to his grandmother. From the first notes the ensemble, led by concertmaster Laura Hamilton, conveyed the right mood and established a bath of tonal beauty that benefitted every piece to come.

Mozart’s *Concertone* for two violins and orchestra is a piece that gets occasional hearings, and here it received justification for more thanks to the collective warm sound, natural phrasing, and a Mozartean sense of grace. With this performance Kyung Sun Lee, now professor of violin at Indiana University, rejoined her old ensemble after twenty

years away. She ably led as first soloist, setting styles and tempos and a clear musical path. Even on modern instruments the musicians were credible avatars of 18th-century temperament and discretion. With Mozart recalling concerto grosso practice of an even earlier period, oboist Mary Kausek-Muse and cellist Megan Yip responded with lovely playing, worthy of concertos of their own.

Another rarity is Takemitsu's *Waltz*, an extract from the 1966 film *Face of Another*. It represents a side of the composer unfamiliar to most, though we learned from Richard Rodda's excellent program notes that Takemitsu devoted more of his career to films than any other classical composer of his stature. This was a persuasive Viennese waltz undertaken by CityMusic in careful fidelity to the score as well as with lusty slices of schmaltz and strudel.

As its title suggests, Bologne's *Symphonie Concertante* is a hybrid genre that draws on both the symphony and concerto traditions. Maybe because Bologne himself was a brilliant violinist, the work emphasizes concerto features, including virtuosic writing for the soloists and traded solo and tutti passages, but foregoes a slow middle movement. Throughout, Kyung Sun Lee and Amy Lee were at peace with any technical challenges, letting charm and elegance preside. There was also joy in the numerous parries and thrusts aimed at each other, which Bologne, Maria Theresa's fencing master, impishly sprinkles in. The Rondeau finale, a lazy Susan of solos, duets, and tuttis, also gave plenty of opportunity for everyone to show off and revel.

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