

**Review: A good week for chamber music and small ensembles in Aspen**

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Special to The Aspen Times

Aspen, CO, Colorado

ASPEN — Nicholas McGegan has conducted a wide variety of composers here, from early to relatively modern, but Thursday night he returned to his wheelhouse: Bach, Vivaldi and Handel. Known for his baroque performances using original instruments, he made a strong case for playing the music on modern instruments. All it takes is to get the musicians immersed in the baroque style.

A small string orchestra of students, supplemented by resident artists on winds for some works, did precisely that. And with McGegan's ebullient podium personality working its magic, the results brought smiles all evening. Even with Inon Barnatan playing J.S. Bach's keyboard Concerto in D minor on a full-size grand piano, Barnatan's precision, verve and elegance never overpowered the ensemble. Indeed, the performance was the highlight of the evening.

**The other solo efforts in a series of Vivaldi concertos, including a dazzling appearance by Adele Anthony and Simone Porter in the Concerto for Two Violins in D major, remained on a high plane.** Per Hannevold's romp through the Bassoon Concerto sounded like he was playing two bassoons, until I realized how seamlessly Thea Oyhus' part in the ensemble melded. Both players were breathtaking. The final nod to Handel, two movements from Water Music, finished the evening with a flourish.

Earlier Thursday, with his customary warmth, precision and musicality, pianist Anton Nel made his case for the MacDowell Piano Concerto, a piece of 19th-century American music not heard often enough. With the main line of the music in the orchestra, the piano persistently elaborates with extensive flourishes. It's all very Liszt-ian. Nel kept the music unfurling vigorously. The all-student Philharmonic, under conductor Mei-Ann Chen, rendered its share in sharp relief. That was better than the waltzes from Richard Strauss' "Der Rosenkavalier," in which they seemed so intent on the notes that the music never opened up and danced.

Cellist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han demonstrated their versatility, musicality and unanimity of purpose in a thoroughly satisfying recital Tuesday night in Harris Hall. The husband-and-wife team's idea was to offer pieces that evoke a variety of emotions in listeners, but in the end, what mattered was the sheer excellence and detail of their playing. Han's shifting colors and Finckel's soaring melodic articulation made the most ambitious work, Chopin's Cello Sonata in G minor, especially vivid. The cellist made his instrument sing from the heart in Messiaen's "Praise to the Eternity of Jesus" from the Quartet for the End of Time. The encore, the impudent march from Britten's Cello Sonata in C, was as pungently funny as the Messiaen was transcendent.

The most rewarding surprise on Monday's chamber music was hearing Copland's atmospheric Quiet City in a new version quite different from the trumpet, English horn and strings Copland wrote for the concert hall. For that 1941 version, Copland reworked material he wrote as incidental music for a play that never made it past tryouts. Christopher Brelochs' 2007 rewrite went back to the original instrumentation, scored for trumpet (Brynn Marchiando, a 2012 fellow), clarinet (Peter Cain), alto saxophone (Zachary Shemon) and piano (Daniel Pesca). He also worked in additional material from the stage cues. The student musicians created an evocative soundscape with wonderful sonorities. Marchiando caught the lonely, bluesy feel perfectly.

On the same program, resident musicians Nadine Asin (flute), James Dunham (viola) and Deborah Hoffman (harp) lavished superb playing on Prelude " ... sans void parmi les void ..." a wistful, if forgettable, score by Bernard Rands. Dunham returned with Sylvia Rosenberg (violin), Michael Mermagen (cello) and Nel for an uplifting, beautifully nuanced Mozart Piano Quartet in G Minor.

What not to miss this weekend

Schoenberg's lush, hyper-Romantic and fully tonal "Verklärte Nacht," in the original string sextet version, highlights Saturday afternoon's chamber music in Harris Hall. Any Mahler performance is an event, and the Symphony No. 1 is on Sunday's Festival Orchestra program. Daniel Hope plays Prokofiev's cheeky Violin Concerto No. 2. Thomas Søndergård conducts. And Monday night, Nel returns with colleague Eric Kim in the Mendelssohn Cello Sonata, preceded by a favorite of percussion fanciers, George Crumb's "Music for a Summer Evening."