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Traveling Through Time and Space at the Music Faculty Recital

by Katie Nauss

(Music 1108)

This past Thursday, March 10th, I had the pleasure of attending the College of DuPage Music Faculty Recital. It was a valuable experience for me to see professional educators share their craft, as well as to hear a wide range of musical compositions from all over the spectrum of time and geography. The program featured South American guitar pieces performed by Stephen Ramsdell Mara Leonard and Emi Murato joining together on cello and piano respectively to present two sonatas and a Chinese piece a flowing piece by Sergei Rachmaninoff played by Karol Sue Reddington a set of German pieces sung by Jennifer Barnickel-Fitch and accompanied by Steven Havens and finally a pair of piano duets performed by Emi Murata and Patricia Rusk.

The evening began refreshingly, with Stephen Ramsdell presenting guitar works by South American composers. The works of Heitor Villa-Lobos, the national composer of Brazil, shone especially. Ramsdell presented the pieces by explaining that Villa-Lobos was a folkloric composer of the people, writing what he called “street music.” At the start of *Choros No. 1*, one is instantly transported to the streets of Brazil. Its varying tempos and fermatas mimicked the rhythms of people buzzing in the streets, slowing to view a market stand, running around the corner. These rhythmic qualities more largely created a visage of scene changes, with the piece even taking on a relaxed 1950’s cabana feel at one point. It is obvious how Villa-Lobos earned his reputation and status in Brazil, as every ebb and flow of this composition painted a picture of a day in the life of a Brazilian citizen.

Similarly, Karol Sue Reddington transported us emotionally with her performance of Rachmaninoff’s *Liebesleid (Love’s Sorrow)*. Written in 1921, Rachmaninoff transcribed Kreisler’s *Liebesleid*, along with 13 other pieces. Here, it was not paired with its usual counterpoint, *Liebesfreud (Love’s Joy)*; rather, Reddington presented it alone—its lack of a sunny conclusion making it even more deliciously sad. Love’s sorrow indeed—wow did this piece depict the sweet sorrow of falling in and out of love. The piece began with ease, flowing majestically into intermittent abrupt rests, followed by a playful, almost whimsical section reminiscent of carousel music. From here, Rachmaninoff takes us to a minor key, with a high-pitched and disjunct right hand melody, suddenly returning to the same theme as the beginning of the piece—majestic and abrupt—this time in minor. Next, the piece ascends to a higher pitch class into a section that sounds like a dream sequence, only to return once again to the opening theme—this time far more chaotic—and finally ending on the tonic. A whirlwind of emotion from whimsy to heartache and back home again set by familiar tropes, this piece was most definitely the star of the night.

The moment of the evening that truly bred admiration of the talented faculty was the penultimate piece of the program, the first movement of Mozart’s *Sonata in D Major for Two Pianos, K. 448*, “I. Allegro con spirito.” It was a pleasure to hear one of Mozart’s only pieces composed for two pianos, and just 25 years old. Rusk’s introduction was especially illuminating, as she informed us that research has shown that this piece in particular has been proven to improve spatial reasoning skills and reduce the number of seizures in people with epilepsy. Listening to this movement, it’s not hard understand. It began with the two pianos presenting the theme, with one piano consistently echoing the other, followed by the two coming together grandly—a real treat to behold. The development didn’t last long, as before we knew it, the two pianists were on to the recapitulation, only they had changed jobs—the one who echoed in the beginning was now playing

the first iteration of the theme. It was a bit of fun work noticing this switch and keeping up with the echoes, the distance between the two voices present in the theme, and the changing relationship between them. All in all, the evening with the COD Music Faculty and the wide range of material presented at such a high skill level was both educational and downright impressive. Whether we were transported to another place, another mindset, or a place in our brain we didn't know existed, it was a very enjoyable experience.

Bibliography

Ramsdell, Stephen; Reddington, Karol Sue; Rusk, Patricia and Emi Murata. "Comments." Program: College of DuPage Music Faculty Recital March 2016, pp 4-6.