

Review**BlueWater Chamber Orchestra
at Plymouth Church (November 16)**

by Guytano Parks



BlueWater Chamber Orchestra, conducted by founder and Artistic Director Carlton R. Woods presented an enlightening and entertaining program of works by John Corigliano, Carl Maria von Weber, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Peter Maxwell Davies on Saturday evening at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights. The featured soloists were Amitai Vardi, principal clarinet of BWCO, and fifteen year-old St. Ignatius High School sophomore Jieming Tang, violin, who made his orchestral debut on this occasion.

Opening the program was Corigliano's *Voyages for Strings*, an instrumental version of an a cappella choral work that was a setting of Baudelaire's *L'Invitation au voyage*. Plymouth Church proved to be the ideal space for this sensual music — beautifully played with wondrous blend and balance — to breathe and soar. Points of resolution were heavenly as the players mused and ambled through Corigliano's sometimes ambiguous harmonic territory.

Jieming Tang impressed with his lovely, lyrical playing of Beethoven's *Romance No. 2, Op. 50*,. Projecting clearly and effortlessly above the orchestra at all times, his tone was sweet and clear in the upper register and deep and rich in the lower. Beethoven's well-crafted piece benefitted from Mr. Tang's expressive delivery of every detail, and Woods and the orchestra gave him fine and graceful support.

A dramatic orchestral introduction sets the stage for the soloist's entrance in Weber's *Concertino for Clarinet and Orchestra, Op. 26*. Extremely operatic in style, the clarinet assumes the role of a coloratura soprano, but with a much broader range, fully exploiting the musical and technical qualities and possibilities of the instrument. Amitai Vardi reached the highs and lows and everything in between with aplomb. Details of articulation and phrasing, plus exciting dynamics and expressive nuances gave shape and meaning to phrases.



Deeper emotions and darker colors were effective in the slower section, which featured nicely shaded pianissimos by both soloist and orchestra. The energy and excitement generated throughout was enhanced by the brass and timpani, especially during the fast finale. Mr. Vardi ended the piece brilliantly with a virtuosic series of figurations, arpeggios and a final scale rocketing to a high note.

Joyous and exuberant, Mendelssohn's *Symphony No. 4, Op. 90 "Italian"* really took flight in this performance with extremely deft and agile playing by all sections of the orchestra. Woods's tempo in the opening *Allegro vivace* was fleet and the character lighthearted. Often referred to as the "Pilgrim's March," the second movement was played with superb balances and a sense of slow, perpetual motion. The third movement was blissful with lilting phrases and long, flowing and overlapping lines. The brass played brightly while the strings tip-toed in response with dotted rhythms.

In the finale — which combines two *saltarello* themes with a *tarantella* figure — the precise, detailed playing of the winds achieved a dizzying, controlled frenzy, while the strings played long whirling lines of notes. Woods kept everything tightly wound in one of the great orchestral *tours de force*, and brought this vertiginous movement to a wild conclusion.

One would have thought that the Mendelssohn would have been the obvious choice with which to end the program, but what a provocative and entertaining surprise Davies's *An Orkney Wedding, With Sunrise* turned out to be! Scottish snaps and hiccuping syncopations. Listing and limping. Swaying and staggering. All the elements of a traditional Scottish wedding were there, personified in sound. The *Italian Symphony* embodied a tightly controlled frenzy, but *Orkney Wedding* was a deliciously out-of-control (but well-controlled) drunken debacle, and it was an absolute delight. As the *piece de resistance*, a blaring bagpiper entered the scene in full Highland dress, making his way up the center aisle to join the orchestra "not in the stirring type of music associated with the pipes, but more of a drudge bemoaning the end of a glorious night." There really was nothing that could follow that!

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