

Review**The Arsenal Duo at Stambaugh Auditorium (March 30)**

by Robert Rollin



Last Sunday afternoon, March 30, Youngstown's Stambaugh Auditorium hosted a marvelous concert by *The Arsenal Duo* of organist and Girard, Ohio native Edward Alan Moore and pianist Nathan Carterette.

This rather unusual musical combination showed itself to be one of exceptional artistic quality and surprisingly precise ensemble. Both musicians, virtuosos of their instruments, clearly took the requisite time to prepare their varied program carefully. Since very little repertoire exists for this pairing, the *Duo* used considerable skill and scholarly preparation to produce their musical arrangements.

The afternoon's highpoint was the George Gershwin *Rhapsody in Blue*, as arranged by the performers.

Moore mentioned that he used Gershwin's own two-piano version as primary source material. The opening introduction clarinet stop solo displayed the newly renovated Skinner organ's amazing tonal clarity and delicate articulation. A subsequent melody line on a brassy trumpet stop came to the fore with nicely shaded accompaniment. Carterette performed the virtuoso piano passages with flair and appropriate pianistic spontaneity.

An effective bassoon stop presented a lower range tune, as both players melded their parts together with excellent ensemble and an elegant tempo flexibility worthy of Gershwin. They never over-sentimentalized or exaggerated things, but played with a surprisingly nuanced interpretation appropriate to the style.

The slower middle section showed true grace in the lightly registered soft passages. The final *Agitato e misterioso* fairly glowed with flashy pyrotechnics. Later the performers clearly exposed the earliest themes, and achieved the dramatic dynamic and tempo contrasts that brought the piece to an effective close.

Renowned twentieth century organist/composer Louis Vierne provided an excellent solo for Moore in *Carillon de Longpont, Op. 31, No. 21*. Vierne, who was organist at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, toured the United State in 1927 and developed a love for the Skinner organs typified by Stambaugh Auditorium's large instrument. He even corresponded with the organ builder and dedicated a piece to him. The *Carillon de Longpont* is

a set of variations on a theme sometimes appearing in the pedals. Moore's performance employed clear registration and gave the piece the crystalline elegance it requires.

The *Duo* also adapted Franz Liszt's *Totentanz* to their unique pairing, employing Liszt's own two-piano version, and assigning the second piano part to the organ. Moore explained that though the "death dance" evokes dancing skeletons in the minds of modern audiences, it is actually a set of technically challenging variations on the modal *Dies Irae* theme of the Gregorian *Requiem Mass*.

The performers elicited interesting colors, particularly with the attractive, lighter reed stops, the alternation of thematic material between the two instruments, and Carterette's powerfully brilliant piano passages. The rapid scherzo, dominated by dotted rhythm alternations, led to a well-crafted contrapuntal section containing many overlapping strettos. Carterette tossed off his solos with panache.

Moore soloed on Johann Sebastian Bach's *Come Sweetest Death* as arranged for the modern organ by Virgil Fox. Fox specialized in Skinner organs and even played a Stambaugh organ recital here in 1947. This chorale prelude is a masterpiece. Moore approached it tastefully and ended with a charming thinning out and some delicate use of the tremulant.

Carterette's rendition of Maurice Ravel's challenging *Jeux d'eau* was graceful and a delight. Despite devilish hand crossings, he kept the main lines clear while controlling the difficult accompaniment. His performance was flawless.

The *Duo* opened the program with their version of *The Star-Spangled Banner*. They modeled their piece on the Leopold Godowsky virtuoso version for piano, maintaining a stately measured tempo and allowing all the frills to effectively decorate the tune.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 1, 2014