

Baritone Edward Vogel creates a sentimental “Palace in the Wild” (May 11)

by Stephanie Manning



Plenty of concerts trace a kind of journey, using music to tell a story. But Edward Vogel’s recent recital with the Rocky River Chamber Music Society felt particularly personal.

The baritone, who has lived and performed in Cleveland for five years, announced to the audience at West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church that he and his husband would be relocating to Tennessee the very next day.

Thankfully, before that happened, we got to

hear “A Palace in the Wild: Journeys in British Art Song,” the beautiful program he brought to Rocky River on May 11.

Together with pianist Jenny Parker, Vogel guided the listeners through the five-part evening, contributing oral program notes throughout. The selections celebrate the “beautiful and underrated” genre of art song, specifically from British composers — a combination Vogel noted is less-often heard in the U.S. The structure followed the path of a life, from youthfulness, to seeking adventure, to grappling with a changed meaning of home.

Vogel made the benefits of this repertoire apparent from the first two selections by Ivor Gurney. He delivered the English texts with crisp diction, which decreased the time listeners spent glancing down at the paper program. Mostly performed from memory, he acted out many of the songs, emphasizing the sentimentality of Gerald Finzi’s “Summer Schemes” and the insistence of Ralph Vaughan Williams’ “Linden Lea.”

Parker was a sensitive partner at the piano, mirroring Vogel’s bittersweet melody in Michael Head’s “Sweet chance, that led my steps abroad” and adding a veil of apprehension to Rebecca Clarke’s “The Cloths of Heaven.” Throughout, she made involved feats of coordination seem deceptively simple.

Vogel's warm and rich voice works well with the long lines and emotional arcs of this repertoire. He can easily project over an orchestra and fill a room, although that necessitated a bit of adjustment for this smaller space — the church's boomy acoustic made his loudest dynamics sound a bit overzealous. Still, that made the calmer selections all the more sweeter, as he injected a quiet awe into John Ireland's "Sea Fever."

Vaughan Williams' *Songs of Travel*, which arrived after intermission, provided a microcosm of the program's life journey theme. Vogel and Parker treated the nine short movements with care, swiftly transitioning from the opening sense of adventure to the sorrowful midpoint and the bittersweet ending. "Whither Must I Wander" stood out as particularly moving, including the phrase that inspired the title of the program: "a palace in the wild."

The grief of "King David" by Herbert Howells and the poignant encore "All You Who Sleep Tonight" by Jonathan Dove wrapped things up in a reflective mood. But the penultimate "I was a lover and his lass" by Gerald Finzi was a cheerful reminder that after a cold winter, spring will come again. Cleveland will certainly miss Edward Vogel, but his future is undoubtedly bright.

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