

Review**Music from the Western Reserve:
pianist Caroline Oltmanns (September 15)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Youngstown State University piano professor Caroline Oltmanns launched the new season of Music From The Western Reserve's distinguished concert series at Christ Episcopal Church in Hudson on Sunday afternoon with an engaging hour of music by Schubert, Beethoven, James Wilding and Chopin. Oltmanns's easy confidence as a performer and her skill as a commentator drew the nice-sized audience in as though listeners and performer were gathered together in an intimate living room.

The centerpiece of the afternoon was Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata, op. 53, which Oltmanns prefaced with the intelligence that the sonata's earlier nickname was *L'Aurore (Dawn)* and with the caveat that this would, at 25 minutes, be the most demanding listening assignment of the afternoon. She dispatched the work with a refreshing straightforwardness and relaxed tempos which allowed the music to breathe in places where other pianists press nervously forge ahead. The final *prestos* gained extra character from that approach.

Oltmanns began her program with Schubert's e-flat *Impromptu*, an agreeable burst of lyricism with nicely-voiced chords. A set of Chopin pieces — the *Nocturne in c, op. 48*, *Etude in A-flat, op. 25 no. 1, "Harp"* and the *Scherzo in c-sharp, op. 39* — revealed the pianist's gentle virtuosity and sure touch.

The pianist's banter with the audience included a "don't be afraid" prologue to James Wilding's *Stalking Bit by Bit* (2001) and *Take Nine* (2011), which followed the Beethoven. No one needed to be wary: Wilding's comical cat and mouse epic was modern but no more frightening than a Tom & Jerry cartoon, while *Take Nine* rang changes on an accessible nine-beat-to-the-bar pattern that was only mildly dissonant and quite listenable. Oltmanns coyly revealed afterwards that Wilding was her husband. He would have received the same warm applause in any case.

Music From the Western Reserve continues its exploration of the region's musical talent with concerts by Cleveland Orchestra cellist Brian Thornton (October 20), Violinist Yang

Zeng (November 3), Jazz pianist Michael Petrone (February 23), Marimba Masters of Cleveland (March 16) and Cleveland Orchestra principal trumpet Michael Sachs (April 27). All concerts at Christ Church in Hudson on Sundays at 5. Tickets at the door.

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