

## Review: BW Art Song Festival culminates in performances by ten singer-pianist teams (May 24)

by Daniel Hathaway



After a week of intense master classes, a lecture, and a pair of recitals by soprano Joan Rodgers with pianist Roger Vignoles, and baritone Andrew Garland with pianist Warren Jones, the ten singer-pianist teams for whom the twenty-second Baldwin Wallace Art Song Festival was designed got the opportunity to show off their vocal and pianistic wares — and presumably some newly-acquired skills — in a free recital in Gamble Auditorium on Saturday evening, May 24.

Even with each team allotted only three songs, it could have turned into a long evening, but executive director Joanne Uniatowski and her team kept things moving along at a brisk clip and held the intermission to the announced ten minutes. Though the thirty songs sped by in a mere 90 minutes or so, the proceedings never felt rushed, just efficient.

If Saturday's performers are any indication, the tradition of the Art Song is alive and in good voices and hands. Any of the ten pairs of singer/pianists would have been capable of sustaining the interest of an audience for an entire evening, though of course there were some standouts.

Mezzo-soprano Kim Lauritsen and pianist Lee Schmitz got the audience to laugh out loud with two irreverent songs from Jake Heggie's *Of Gods and Cats*, enlivened by Lauritsen's excellent diction and droll acting.

Baritone Isaac Wenger and pianist Hanna Chung charmed the listeners with Wenger's expressive facial expressions and well-enunciated patter songs (complete with whistling) in two of Charles Ives's *Five Street Songs*.

No humorous gimmicks were in the works for soprano Elizabeth Maurey and pianist Ron Maurey, just alluring performances of Strauss and Poulenc with impressive fluttery right-hand filigree in the former.

Deadpan humor returned along with some skillful acting in baritone Jonathan Cooper and pianist Andrew Cooper's performance of Butterworth's *Seventeen Come Sunday*. Andrew Cooper brought a note of high-tech into their set by playing from a tablet computer.

Soprano Emily Riley (with Frank Chu at the piano) brought a large, operatic voice and expert command of French, German and Russian to passionate songs by Duparc, Strauss and Rachmaninoff.

French, Russian and German also posed no problems for mezzo-soprano Clara Osowski, who sang Debussy, Grechaninov and Joseph Marx with an inviting smile and nicely-focused tone (Mark Bilyeu was at the keyboard).

Soprano Minkyong Kim was impressive in her high register in a Milhaud selection (she was partnered with pianist Eunhye Song). More diction would have made it easier to follow the translation in a Rodrigo *Madrigale*.

Baritone Brian Mummert (with pianist Andrew Hann) constructed an interesting program of Schumann, Blitzstein and Chris DeBlasio (from *The AIDS Quilt Songbook*) and sang them winningly.

Soprano Rebecca Brinkley, teamed with pianist Tzu-Hwa Ho, put her Poulenc, Debussy and Musto songs across with an expressive face and alluring tone.

Baritone José Rubio chose two Vaughan Williams songs from *The House of Light* and Strauss's *Zueignung* for himself and pianist Allie Su. Though the English songs might have been a notch faster, he sang them with expressive conviction.

The level of talent was impressive on Saturday evening. Though the art of the Art Song is a rather special nook in the category of chamber music, there were signs of vitality and novelty onstage in Gamble Auditorium that bode well for modern ways of communicating between one singer, one pianist and an audience.

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