

Black Squirrel Winds on Music from the Western Reserve series (March 12)

by Robert Rollin



On Sunday afternoon, March 12 at Hudson's Christ Episcopal Church, Music from the Western Reserve presented an exceptional concert of sextets by Kent State's Black Squirrel Winds and guests. The group, named for the furry creatures inhabiting Kent's

grassy campus, consists of five talented wind players with genuine rapport.

The afternoon's highlight was a scintillating performance of Francis Poulenc's Sextet, featuring guest pianist Elizabeth DeMio. Poulenc, not a fan of the ethereal qualities of French Impressionism, uses bold musical colors. The piece is full of mercurial swings, from the sounds of bustling Parisian streets to a wistful sentimentality.

After a fiery, toccata-like passage, bassoonist Mark DeMio's soulful introduction led to Elizabeth DeMio's lyrical and tender piano solo. Hornist Kent Larmee negotiated an expressive leap and exchanged phrases with clarinetist Amitai Vardi.

A beautiful oboe and bassoon doubling created contrast, then the music subsided into gorgeous minor sonorities. Oboist Danna Sundet boldly took the lead at the fast recurrence, and flutist Diane McCloskey Rechner played an attractive solo of her own.

In the second movement, Sundet again led with a beautiful solo accompanied by piano. Her strong timbre easily stood out against the accompaniment, and Vardi gave his own expressive solo.

The finale is a free rondo enlivened by fast-moving syncopations. After a sentimental piano solo, a gorgeous low-range bassoon solo led to a long ritardando with a piquantly dissonant close.

The afternoon included a fine performance of Leos Janáček's *Mládi* ("Youth"). Janáček composed the Sextet in his 70th year, adding a bass clarinet to the standard woodwind quintet complement. Vardi performed that part with obvious relish, joined by Tiago Delgado, who played the B-flat clarinet with panache.

After the rapid first movement with its intricately syncopated motives, bass clarinet and oboe had exquisite solos in the second. The third movement added piccolo and quoted the *Blue Boys March*, a theme the composer heard from the band of the occupying Prussian Army as a 12-year-old chorister in Brno. Clarinet and flute echoed luscious oboe solos in the finale, and one last tutti lurched to a rapid conclusion.

The concert opened with Alexandre Tansman's single-movement *La Danse de la Sorcière*, arranged for wind quintet and piano from his ballet *Le Jardin du Paradis*. A rumbling bassoon solo, charming interchanges between piano and bassoon, and an engaging clarinet solo gave luster to this bustling piece, which finally rushed in an ascending tutti to its exciting end.

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