

BlueWater Chamber Orchestra with Meyer & Pedersen (Nov. 11)

by Daniel Hathaway



Conductor Daniel Meyer and soprano Laura Pedersen were the featured guests for the first of two weekend concerts by BlueWater Chamber Orchestra on Saturday, November 11 at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights. The Saturday performance was a ticketed event, while a repeat performance the following afternoon at Pilgrim Church in Tremont was free, thanks to Cuyahoga Arts and Culture — perhaps accounting for a rather slim audience on Saturday.

Meyer, who is music director of the Asheville Symphony and Erie Philharmonic, began the straight-through program with Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, in an reading that felt hurried in some spots and sluggish in others. Closer attention to phrasing would have made the passing of lines between soloists and sections more fluid in the Prelude, and greater dynamic contrasts would have served this entire suite of charmingly orchestrated piano pieces well — *pianissimo* markings abound, but were rarely observed.



Laura Pedersen was featured in Samuel Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, a setting of a wistful and haunting prose poem by James Agee. The BlueWater management included the complete text as a program insert — a useful gesture because it was often difficult to make out the words. The soprano sang with a uniformly beautiful tone that didn't always reflect the complexity of Agee's colorful writing. In addition to invoking nostalgia, *Knoxville* also refers to a horse that draws a buggy, "breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt," and a streetcar "raising its iron

moan; stopping; belling and starting, stertorous; rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan.” But then Pedersen was at a basic disadvantage: Meyer allowed the orchestra to cover her singing during long stretches of the music. Otherwise, the piece came across effectively thanks to some lovely wind playing.

The program ended with an energetic performance of Schubert’s *Symphony No. 2*. The winsome work of a late teenager, the piece took on almost Beethovenian proportions on Saturday evening. Dynamics were generally on the loud side of the spectrum, and tuttis overpowered the acoustic of the room — a space where a string quartet alone can powerfully move the air.

BlueWater boasts an excellent roster of freelance players who on Saturday seemed either to need more rehearsal time or more intervention from the podium. The repertoire was well-chosen, and hopefully some things that didn’t work at Plymouth got fixed in time for Sunday’s performance at Pilgrim.

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