

Chagrin Arts: Barrick Stees fuses art and music (Apr. 26)

by David Kulma



Cleveland Orchestra assistant principal bassoon Barrick Stees has had a longtime love of visual art that he finally turned into a musical event — “A Fusion of Art and Music with Barry Stees & Friends” at Chagrin Falls United Methodist Church on Friday, April 26. As part of the Chargin Arts Performing Arts Series, Stees paired delightful chamber music with the fascinating art that inspired it, projected for all to see.

Stees is a master of the bassoon. He managed all the technical difficulties with finesse, and the full-bodied quality of his singing tone from top to bottom was astounding. In well-thought-out remarks on both the art and mainly newer music by living composers, he gave off a charming self-deprecating air. He played with such skill and musicality that this thoughtfully curated and visually stimulating concert showcased his instrument’s many virtues.

Wassily Kandinsky’s famous *Composition #8* directly inspired Jiří Trtík’s opening work of the same name for solo bassoon, originally written for one of Stees’ students. Here he premiered a revised version of the quirky piece that ably turned Kandinsky’s bouncing geometric *mélange* into short, chopped-up ideas amid raucous extended techniques.

Shapes by Jeffrey Rathbun was commissioned in collaboration with Stees and his wife, video and knitting artist Melinda K.P. Stees, joined by pianist Randall Fusco. Rathbun’s polychordal and ostinato-driven music beautifully matched the artist’s video *Shaping Reality*, which featured unspooling yarn metamorphosing into stunningly distorted cubes and spheres based on her fantastically precise, poster-sized “image knits.”

Paul Moravec’s witty *Andy Warhol Sez* was paired with scraps of insouciant video by this most famous of pop artists. Stees and Fusco brought the right amount of panache to

this effective take on Warhol's deadpan aesthetic. Accompanying the charmingly ludicrous video, the seven movements paired an obtuse quote with Moravec's mildly morose, sometimes spiky or churning character pieces.

After intermission, the Callisto Quartet — violinists Paul Aguilar and Rachel Stenzel, violist Eva Kennedy, and cellist Hannah Moses — joined Stees for Susan Kander's *Museum Pieces*. Inspired by works in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Kander's four movements explored lovely Debussy-influenced textures, an enraptured viola solo as nude subject with a quartet of competing angry prudes, some heartfelt slow music, and a silly barn dance. Although it's on the long side, Stees and the Callistos brought this pleasing work engagingly to life.

Daniel Baldwin's *River of Light* was influenced by Frederick Edwin Church's *El Rio de Luz*, a gorgeous South American landscape. Stees and Fusco played this short, beautiful work with great care.

Edgar Degas's painting *L'Orchestre de l'Opéra* is a famous oddity in which his bassoonist friend Désiré Dihau sits uncharacteristically front and center. Astutely, Stees dug up a charming piece by Dihau titled *L'Appel* ("The Call") to pair with the Degas. Played with aplomb by Stees and Fusco, this virtuosic *concours*-style work is a good-humored series of fluffy waltz variations.

Jenni Brandon's *Going to the Sun: Snapshots from Glacier National Park* paired Stees with oboist Cynthia Watson Sperl. To accompany this pleasant eight-section, one-movement work, Stees used his friend Paul Schwendener's beautiful photographs from their hike last summer. Watson and Stees gave this pretty piece a loving reading to close the evening.

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