

ChamberFest Cleveland: “Spirited Away” at Disciples Church (June 17)

by Daniel Hathaway



The post-COVID era may be on the horizon, but it hasn't arrived yet. That dastardly microbe that has wrought havoc in the performing arts world for more than two years is still on the prowl.

Just ask Jessica Peek Sherwood, ChamberFest Cleveland's new executive director, whose first official acts since coming on board June 1st have been to replace musicians whose positive test

results have left them on the sidelines.

Swapping out individuals in a festival roster can often be accomplished quickly and efficiently, as for ChamberFest's opening concert when Rising Star Sterling Elliott offered to step in for another cellist without missing a beat. It's not so simple when a guest ensemble like King's Return, the Dallas male vocal quartet, is scheduled to headline a concert.

On June 17, when one of its singers tested positive for COVID, the entire quartet was forced to withdraw from “Spirited Away,” and there went much of the *raison d'être* of the program: music inspired by Black spirituals.



Announcing the change at the top of the evening, Sherwood told the audience gathered in the Cultural Arts Center of Disciples Church that a substitute quartet had been found on some eight hours' notice right in ChamberFest's hometown of Cleveland Heights — *Elégie*, founded in 2014 by Heights High graduates Brian, Mist'a, Michael & Caleb of the classes of 2009 and 2011.

With great aplomb and audience-charming gestures, Elégie sang three sets during the program, including William Dawson's *Spiritual Soon-ah will be done with the troubles of this world*, and a wild version of *Wade in the Water, Children*, mixed in with such close harmony standards as *Ebb Tide*.

Playing the *Molto Adagio* from George Walker's "Lyric" *Quartet No. 1*, violinists Diana Cohen and Sarah Kapustin, violist Teng Li, and cellist Sterling Elliott wove long, poignant, elegiac lines that have reminded many of Samuel Barber's *Adagio*, also originally a movement from a *Quartet No. 1*.

Kapustin and pianist Evren Ozel followed a second set of vocal quartet pieces with brilliant, rhythmically vital performances of Jascha Heifetz's reworkings of six selections from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. The violinist shared some apparently amusing remarks with the audience, but she chose not to use the microphone that stood onstage, leaving many of us clueless.

Clarinetist Franklin Cohen joined Kapustin, Elliot, and pianist Roman Rabinovich in Tigran Mansurian's strangely stark *Agnus Dei*, which gradually jettisoned shape and musical energy until only pointillistic fragments remained.

Dvorak's *American Quartet* that ended the evening was to have been introduced by a King's Return performance of the composer's *Goin' Home*, but the *Wade in the Water* arrangement served just as well. Violinists Joseph Lin and Diana Cohen, violist Ting Li, and cellist Sterling Elliott sent the large audience out into the pleasant summer night with a richly tuneful and festive work that its Czech creator thought reverberated with the spirit of the folk of the New World.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 18, 2022.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)