

ChamberFest goes outdoors with “Music on the Path” (June 16)

by Max Newman



The 2024 edition of ChamberFest Cleveland has already seen a variety of wonderful events since its opening on June 12. However, the June 16 musical celebration of “CFC at the Nature Center: Music on the Path,” was the perfect addition to ChamberFest’s diverse programming and undoubtedly put a smile on the faces of all who attended.

Centered around the parking lot of the Nature Center, the sunlit late-morning event at Shaker Lakes had an inviting, family-friendly atmosphere. Slightly past the shaded visitor’s information tent, another tent provided a variety of tasty donuts along with beverages such as water, coffee, and fruit juice. Here, people milled about, chatting excitedly and relishing in the good energy surrounding them.

The physical reaches of “Music on the Path” continued into the surrounding forest. Between towering trees and the Shaker Lakes Visitor Center, an arts tent was set up where children and families could create their own collages out of glue and felt. A little ways through the woods themselves, visitors could enjoy a music-centered storytime at a wooden structure beneath a beautiful, dense canopy of leaves.

And in a small, open clearing further down a wooded path upon the boardwalk, children could try out a selection of instruments including serrated wood blocks, hand drums, and steel tongue drums. The event mirrored the cloudless sky that hung above it: free from tension, full of warmth.

The day’s musical performances took place consecutively at three locations around the area. Amidst the reptile and amphibian enclosures of the brightly-lit Visitor Center, harpist Bridget Kibbey and violinist Alexi Kenney played haunting yet beautiful

melodies that created an atmospheric allure. Showcasing their flawless technique, both performers immersed themselves into the feelings of the works.

At the Treehouse Gazebo, located on the boardwalk above a gorgeous, wildlife-filled marsh, Adam Golka and Nelson Ricardo Yovera Perez formed a formidable piano and horn duo during Robert Schumann's *Adagio and Allegro*, Op. 70. There was a delightful contrast between the music itself, distinctly nocturnal, and the bright early afternoon air; the piece was so enveloping it was easy to forget the time of day. This performance also featured some enthralling interpretive dancing. The way the dancers paired their movements with the music ensured that all performers — musicians and non-musicians — never felt like they were part of different experiences.

The two anchoring performances of the afternoon took place in the Friends Pavilion located nearby, off the central parking lot. Here, visitors could sit underneath the pavilion roof while musicians and dancers performed at the front of the space, from a semicircle of chairs and an open section of concrete floor.

The opening performance, the first movement of Felix Mendelssohn's *String Quintet in B-Flat*, was a mesmerizing array of pastoral melodies and delicately moving notes. The distinctly happy piece perfectly matched the joyous occasion. The tones of the instruments were astonishingly bright and full of depth — sound filled the pavilion to the brim, rushing into every nook and cranny. The dancers, covered in monochromatic veils, were also exceptional; they roamed the area like colorful cyclones, adding an exclamation point to each and every note played.

The afternoon's most impressive performance was the final one: selections from John Adams's *John's Book of Alleged Dances*, for string quartet and pre-recorded tape. This spellbinding piece — full of clicks, whirrs, plucked notes, and unexpected melodic turns — felt whimsically magical, like the soundtrack to a fantasy world. It felt as though the sounds that the musicians were creating mirrored the irregular beauty of the sounds of wildlife.

The dancers allowed themselves to be guided by the score, drifting this way and that in a display of beautiful chaos. It was a fitting finale; there was certainly a little extra bounce in the step of all who had enjoyed this performance, and “Music on the Path” in its entirety.

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