

BlueWater Chamber Orchestra Continues its 15th Anniversary with Covenant Concert (Mar. 1)

by Daniel Hathaway



When BlueWater Chamber Orchestra made its debut at the Breen Center on September 12, 2010, its founder and conductor Carlton Woods introduced the new ensemble with an ambitious program of works that included Maurice Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Howard Hanson's *Serenade for Flute, Harp and Strings*, Ludwig van Beethoven's *Romance in F* for violin and orchestra, Edward Elgar's *Serenade for Strings*, and Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera's *Variaciones Concertantes*.

In a review of that performance, I wrote

The orchestral showpiece of the afternoon was Ginastera's Concert Variations, described by Woods as "the South American Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra." Beginning with Kent Collier's big cello solo accompanied by harpist Jody Guinn, the work showcased the fine solo talents of violist Laura Shuster, clarinetist Alix Reinhardt, concertmaster Kenneth Johnston, hornist Ken Wadenpfohl and bassist Ann Gilbert, as well as the fine ensemble acumen of the rest of the orchestra.

On March 1, BlueWater Chamber Orchestra continued their 15th anniversary season with "Tapestry of Virtuosity and Folklore" at the Church of the Covenant. Although Carlton Woods had long since departed this life and Daniel Meyer was now in charge, the Ginastera was once again the big work on the program, and many of the performers were the same as in 2010. That underlined BlueWater's organizing principle, "From

Cleveland, For Cleveland,” an orchestra of world class professional musicians who live in Northeast Ohio.”

The somber and passionate opening “Tema per Violoncello ed Arpa” was reprised by Jody Guinn, this time joined by cellist Linda Atherton, whose gorgeous tone filled the Covenant’s nave. The brooding “Interludio per Corde” was beautifully voiced by the full string section.

The spirited “Variazione giocosa per flauta” and “Variazione in modo di Scherzo per Clarinetto” (a country dance) were brilliantly tossed off by Sean Gabriel and Amitai Vardi, and Laura Shuster revisited her haunting solo in the “Variazione drammatica per Viola.”

Singing lines in the “Variazione canonica per Oboe e Fagotto” were crafted by oboist Martin Neubert and bassoonist Phillip Austin, then Dave Duro and David Mitchell joined forces for the “Variazione ritmica per Tromba e Trombone.”

Other players contributed notable solos: Ken Johnston over relentless pizzicatos in “Variazione in mod di Moto perpetuo per Violino,” Ken Wadenpfohl in “Variazione pastorale per Corno,” members of the wind and brass sections in “Interludio per Fiati,” and Ann Gilbert providing an exquisite reminder of the theme in the “Ripresa dal Tema per Contrabasso” with harpist Jodi Guinn.

Ginastera wrapped this whole package up with a Rondo in the form of a wild dance full of syncopated rhythms and Argentine flair. It proved to be so spirited that Meyer repeated the finale as a true encore.

The intermissionless evening — one of BlueWater’s welcome innovations, along with a pay-what-you-can admission policy — began with a rarity. Paul Hindemith’s instantly ingratiating *Five Pieces for String Orchestra* inspired lush sounds from the strings, gave sendups of Baroque music, conjured images of taunting children in a playground, and ended with a battle between concertmaster Ken Johnston and the orchestra. He won, making easy work of his technical solo — interrupted by musical shouts from his colleagues.

Then, Cleveland Orchestra guests Afendi Yusuf, clarinet, and Amy Zoloto, basset horn, regaled the crowd with Felix Mendelssohn’s *Konzerstücke* No. 1 in f and No. 2 in d.

Why haven’t we heard these utterly charming, 8-minute bursts of reedy virtuosity more often?



The opening movement of No. 1 featured lovely phrasing and identical articulations from the players, and a beautiful descent in the middle movement was perfectly in sync. Fast lines fit together hand-in-glove. This was pure Mendelssohnian fun.

No. 2 commenced with a lively tempo and perfect ensemble. This time the middle movement was an opera aria in which Yusuf floated lovely lyrical phrases above Zoloto's

magical bass lines. The third was a fast and furious dash to the end.

It was impossible to imagine a better performance of these musical gems. Are there more delightful pieces like them still lurking undiscovered in Mendelssohn's cabinet of curiosities? Judging from Daniel Meyer's astute programming of this concert, if so, he'll not only seek them out, but also prepare memorable performances of them with his fine BlueWater colleagues.

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