

## Rocky River Chamber Music Society: JR Fralick & Friends (Feb. 24)

by Kate MacKenzie



From somber Shostakovich to carousing cabaret, tenor JR Fralick displayed a range of his abilities on the Rocky River Chamber Music Society's February 24th's concert at West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church.

Fellow Baldwin Wallace faculty members Christine Fuoco, piano, Steve Sang Kyun Koh, violin, Lembi Veskimets, viola, and Khari Joyner, cello, collaborated

with the vocalist for an evening of song.

Shostakovich's *Seven Romances on Poems by Aleksandr Blok* was a dark but gripping start to the evening. Though written for tenor and piano trio, the full ensemble rarely played at once; instead, a dramatic range of moods and timbres emerged as the composer explored different combinations of instruments song by song.

From haunting cello ("Ophelia") to militaristic piano (Gamayun, the bird of prophecy") to sweet violin ("We Were Together"), each new pairing brought something new to Fralick's singing. "Secret Symbols" was a highlight of the later songs, Fralick's tenor mimicking the viola of a string trio as he joined violin and cello in chantlike polyphony.

Though the instrumental writing alone would have been intriguing, it was Fralick's thoughtful and sensitively-executed interpretation that brought Blok's poetry and Shostakovich's music to life.

But it was violist Lembi Veskimets who commanded the stage in the following *Three Songs for Tenor and Viola* (and piano) by Frank Bridge, her rich and vocal playing the perfect complement to Fralick's warm tenor. In contrast to the simple voice part, Veskimets sang across the full range of her instrument, showcasing her precision and tone. Though Bridge's writing lacked the impact of Shostakovich, the performers' beauty of sound made it well worth the listen.



Fralick and Fuoco finished out the concert with two collections of songs. Now free of obligation to an ensemble, Fralick turned up his power and personality for five Lieder by Richard Strauss. Slower numbers like *Ruhe, meine Seele, Op. 27 No. 1* demonstrated his rich tone, while the lighter *All mein Gedanken, Op. 21 No. 1* hinted at the cabaret singer to come. Throughout the concert, Fuoco played with expression and excellent sensitivity, in part a testament to her twenty years of collaboration with Fralick.

The fourth set — and, for the fashion-conscious Fralick, fourth shirt — was a lighter assortment of English and cabaret songs. Even after an evening of almost non-stop singing, Fralick showed no sign of losing energy; a rousing performance of Irving Berlin's *Pack Up Your Sins and Go to the Devil* proved an audience favorite, prompting laughter in each chorus and rigorous applause at its end. A galloping piano intro led in the final work, Frank Bridge's surprisingly jazzy "Love Went A-Riding." The audience was on its feet soon after, awarding Fralick and Fuoco a well-deserved ovation.

*Images captured from the Youtube video.*

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