

North Shore Chamber Music Festival opens with lyrical Dvořák and effervescent Mendelssohn

Thursday, June 07, 2012 at 1:30 pm

By Lawrence A. Johnson

<http://chicagoclassicalreview.com/2012/06/north-shore-chamber-festival-opens-with-lyrical-dvorak-and-effervescent-mendelssohn/>



Pacifica Quartet performed music of Dvořák and Mendelssohn Wednesday night at the North Shore Chamber Music Festival in Northbrook.

major, Op. 12, no. 1. In this early work, one gets the sense of the mercurial young Beethoven bursting with more ideas than he can profitably use. The married collaborators displayed their close artistic bond, with Gluzman's sinewy tone and bold projection matched by Yoffe's sparkling keyboard work, the couple consistently bringing out the rhapsodic inspiration of the opening Allegro. The central variations were fully characterized, by turns dramatic and yearning, and the fiery account of the rollicking finale offered an admirable balance between Beethoven's restless drive and lyric fantasy.

Initial disappointment that Dvořák's much-played Quartet in F major was replacing the advertised Beethoven quartet was soon dispelled. To make this thrice-familiar chamber warhorse sound newly minted is no small feat, yet with the Pacifica Quartet playing at their considerable finest, not a single bar sounded routine.

The mix of dynamic vigor and reflective lyricism was evident from the opening bars in the players' fresh, light-toned approach, as with first violinist Simin Ganatra's airy, feather-light floating of the second theme. Ganatra's phrasing and silky vibrato in the Lento was replicated exactly by cellist Brandon Vamos (the playing of second violinist Sibbi Bernhardsson and violist Masumi Per Rostad at the same high level throughout). The Pacifica's

The North Shore Chamber Music Festival opened its second season Wednesday night at the Village Presbyterian Church in Northbrook. And for those in attendance—and those who listened to the live broadcast on WFMT—the superb performances certainly got the weeklong festival off to a rousing start.

Once again, violinist Vadim Gluzman, festival artistic director, and pianist Angela Yoffe, executive director, have fielded a stellar lineup of colleagues to come together for a bracing array of repertoire, freely mixing chamber chestnuts with contemporary rarities in three programs.

There were some surprises along the way. Those expecting the scheduled Bartok Violin Rhapsody No. 1 and Beethoven Quartet in A minor, Op. 132, instead got Dvořák's *American* Quartet and another work by Beethoven, but given the level of advocacy Wednesday night, few seemed to mind.

Gluzman and Yoffe led off with Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 1 in D

refined tone and wide dynamic range underlined the movement's sweet nostalgic ache, as in *Vamos's* elegiac solo near the coda, an end pin mishap apart. The vigorous Scherzo firmly brought out the Czech rhythms and the Pacifica's fleet and energetic finale capped a performance that made one appreciate the craft and thematic richness of Dvorak's quartet anew.

One of the festival's finest features is its breezy mix of popular repertoire with offbeat contemporary works. Wednesday's musical oddity was Alan Ridout's *Ferdinand the Bull*, based on Munro Leaf's 1936 children's tale about a young bull who would rather smell flowers than fight in the bullring.

Ridout's concise setting for violin and speaker was presented here by a triumvirate with Gluzman joined by duo narrators, Henry Fogel and Kirsten Moomey Merilo doing sign language. Gluzman attacked the violin pyrotechnics with all the iron-fingered intensity required of the Tchaikovsky concerto. Merilo's flamboyantly dramatic signing certainly lent a theatrical element to this slight piece—probably a work better suited for young people's concerts—while Fogel's unfussy, straightforward narration captured the essential sweetness of the tale best.

Mendelssohn's Octet closed the evening with Gluzman and the Pacifica members joined by violinist Olga

Kaler, violist Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt and Mark Kosower, principal cellist of the Cleveland Orchestra.

With its string-writing ingenuity, melodic richness, and astonishing maturity, the Octet, composed at age 16, is an even more remarkable achievement than Mendelssohn's contemporaneous *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture and first two string quartets.

With Gluzman in the first chair, the opening Allegro had an even more concertante feel than usual with the violinist's gleaming tone and bravura playing tending to dominate the textures. The full ensemble came into its own in the Andante with much lovely playing in this lilting lullaby-like movement. In the Scherzo, the players put across the elfin charm of the skittering string

lines, and the effervescent finale was thrown off with fizzing virtuosity by all without sacrificing an essential Mendelssohnian playful charm.

Gluzman introduced the Ridout by saying that *Ferdinand the Bull* "does not need an introduction." Maybe not for some parents and children in the audience, but the rest of us would have liked to know bit more about the work and the composer. More broadly, while the brief informal spoken introductions are nice, they're no substitute for program notes with specific information about the music, especially with repertorial byways of Schnittke, Golijov and Ridout on the menu this year.

North Shore Chamber Music Festival delivers gripping Shostakovich and ebullient Brahms

Saturday, June 09, 2012 at 2:42 pm

By Kyle MacMillan

<http://chicagoclassicalreview.com/2012/06/north-shore-chamber-festival-delivers-gripping-shostakovich-and-ebullient-brahms/>



The Pacifica Quartet performed Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8 Friday night at the North Shore Chamber Music Festival in Northbrook.

In his introductory remarks Friday evening, artistic director Vadim Gluzman promised a concert that would cover the virtual gamut of human emotions, and that is exactly what the North Shore Chamber Music Festival delivered.

The violinist and his wife, pianist Angela Yoffe – both internationally known musicians – founded this three-day event last year in Northbrook, where they have resided for ten years, and, by all appearances, it is flourishing. It has already received the well-deserved imprimatur of WFMT-FM, which aired live broadcasts of two of its concerts at the Village Presbyterian Church, including Friday night's program, and is recording a third for later presentation.

The key to any festival is artistic quality, and this entrepreneurial couple has drawn on their connections in the music world to bring in an assortment of top-notch artists, starting with the Pacifica String Quartet.

This superb ensemble turned in a gritty, gripping performance Friday that captured the raw power and blunt-edged honesty of Dmitri Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8, Op. 110. The Pacifica is in the midst of recording all fifteen of the composer's works in this form, and its commitment to and insight into this amazing set of compositions was obvious. This was intense, all-in playing, especially the quartet's breathless, thrillingly dangerous take on the manic second movement, which seemed poised to careen out of control at any second.

With that piece anchoring the first half, Johannes Brahms' Piano Trio in B minor, Op. 8, culminated the second half, with an ebullient interpretation featuring Gluzman, pianist Adam Neiman and cellist Mark Kosower.

One of the joys of festivals like this is the chance to hear musicians who don't normally perform together. But the danger in such on-the-spot groupings is that the musical personalities might not fit together or there isn't sufficient rehearsal time for the ensemble to gel.

But neither one proved to be a problem here. These three well-matched musicians sounded like they had performed together for years, all ably handling the not inconsiderable demands that this chamber masterwork puts on each. Gluzman delivered his characteristic facility and flair on violin, and Neiman proved to be a strong anchor at the keyboard. Kosower, who took over as principal cellist of the Cleveland Orchestra in 2009, was right home in this intimate setting, deliv-

ering spirited playing with an appealingly resonant, silken tone.

Rather than devote one concert to any one instrumental combination, the North Shore Festival has wisely chosen to change the groupings from selection to selection, allowing for more varied and, in some cases, less frequently heard repertoire.

So, along with the two trios and quartet elsewhere on the program, the second half opened with a short, light-hearted duo – *Moz-Art for Two Violins*, by Alfred Schnittke, a 20th-century composer who remains under-appreciated. The work, one of several that he wrote over a decade and half with the same title, builds on a rediscovered Mozart fragment (K.416d) using Schnittke's trademark assemblage approach, which humorously combines and sometimes clashes a range of styles and sounds.

Gluzman's extroverted musical style and boundless technique was an ideal fit for this showy and deceptively difficult piece. Though a bit more restrained, Sibbi Bernhardsson, the Pacifica's second violinist, more than held his own.

The evening's only disappointment came at the beginning – an underwhelming version of Franz Schubert's *The Shepherd on the Rock*, D. 965. Despite solid performances by clarinetist Alexander Fiterstein and Yoffe, soprano Hyunah Yu never got far enough inside the emotionally layered world of this famed art song trio.

Chamber music festival ends in grand manner with Franck quintet

Sun Jun 10, 2012 at 11:41 am

By Gerald Fisher

<http://chicagoclassicalreview.com/2012/06/chamber-music-festival-ends-in-grand-manner-with-franck-quintet/>



Vadim Gluzman and colleagues concluded the North Shore Chamber Music Festival Saturday night in Northbrook.

A thrilling performance of one of chamber music's greatest masterpieces concluded the third and final program at this year's North Shore Chamber Music Festival.

This second annual festival, dedicated to the memory of a legendary name in Chicago music, Geoffrey Fushi of the Bein and Fushi string franchise, proved that chamber concerts can bring in a large and appreciative paying audience. The Village Presbyterian Church of Northbrook was packed with patrons of all ages Saturday night, who not only demonstrated their enthusiasm for the performances, but willingly stayed on after the last notes for an extensive Q&A with the artists.

There was something very much like a Marlboro Festival collegiality among Saturday's performers, who varied widely in age and experience, but not at all in commitment and first-rate musicality as they rose to the challenge of a demanding and substantial program.

The evening began with a vigorous attack on Stravinsky's *L'histoire du Soldat* in the composer's made-to-order suite for clarinet, violin and piano. The festival's organizers, pianist Angela Yoffe and violinist Vadim Gluzman were joined by clarinetist Alexander Fiterstein in a fiercely dynamic take on this astringent music in a performance, which, for all its dynamism, lacked perhaps the last ounce of tenderness and humor.

Tenderness was certainly not missing in the performance of Oswaldo Golijov's appealing *Tenebrae* for soprano, clarinet and string quartet. This is a classically gorgeous piece in which Gluzman and Fiterstein were joined by violinist Sibbi Bernhardsson, cellist Mark Kosower, violist Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt and most notably by soprano Hyunah Yu whose pure soprano floated in a vocalise above the tonally contrasting strings.

A lot of verbiage was expended in introducing this as a piece of new music, while in fact it is no more "modern" than the music of Canteloube in its time. The lines were both conventional and eternal, and were impeccably realized by all the artists individually and together.

The music of Astor Piazzolla is a surefire audience-pleaser. His *Adios Nonino* and *Fuga & Misterio* were heard in an arrangement for 12 strings, which pushes the boundaries of what is called chamber music and sounds more like a chamber orchestra. The music's lush and sentimental swirling and tango rhythms were

superbly captured by the multigenerational group called the Next Generation String Ensemble.

The crown of the evening and just possibly of the whole festival was the deeply passionate performance of Cesar Franck's Piano Quintet. Here the commitment and intensity of the performers were a fine match for the inherent power of the piece and the audience was transported into the soundworld of a highly original composer.

The artists were pianist Adam Neiman, violinists Gluzman and Bernhardsson violist Pajaro-van de Stadt, with a technique and maturity far beyond her years, and the Cleveland Orchestra's principal Mark Kosower added a firm cello to a performance brimming with life.

Although the first movement is written in sonata form, the impression is more that of a succession of extensive motives repeated randomly rather than fully planned out. The movement's high points were taken at white-hot intensity which built up to an almost orchestral conclusion.

The more introspective second movement was tender and romantic yet simple but emotive in the hands of this remarkable ensemble. The dynamic last movement, marked *con fuoco*, required and received all that is essential to this work's performance: technical fluency, emotional commitment and a complete grasp of the work's unique structure.