Santa Barbara City College Music - February 8, 2015

Linda and Friends — Good Company

Santa Barbara City College was awarded the prestigious Aspen Prize as the top community college in the nation for success in attracting, retaining, and graduating students into jobs and four-year universities in 2013, and the visionary pace at the campus, founded in 1909, continues to quicken. The college’s Music Department in particular, which has actively engaged in community outreach for decades with its Symphony Orchestra and award-winning jazz ensembles and choral groups, has recently redoubled its commitment to presenting concerts beyond the environs of the college’s gorgeous 74 acre seaside campus in downtown Santa Barbara.

On February 8th, SBCC faculty member Dr. Linda Holland presented another of her Linda and Friends recitals, a chamber music series that has been ongoing for 11 years. The afternoon of intriguing works by Beaser, Beethoven, Amaya, and Martinu was performed in the intimate new Weinman Hall on the Music Academy of the West campus. No stranger to the Music Academy, where she directed the MERIT Youth Outreach program from 2003 to 2012, Holland was joined by three colleagues, each well known in Santa Barbara’s busy world of professional music.

Cellist Jacqueline Greenshields has been playing in the Santa Barbara Symphony, Opera Santa Barbara Orchestra, and as Principal of the Santa Barbara Chamber Orchestra for many years. Pianist Anne Weger has been involved in numerous local musical theater productions and recently joined the SBCC Music Department staff as an accompanist and collaborative pianist. Guitarist Tony Ybarra has enjoyed a diverse career in Hollywood (The Tonight Show, Jay Leno) and is on the teaching faculty at both SBCC and Westmont College. The program at Weinman Hall had been presented a couple of days earlier at First United Methodist Church in downtown Santa Barbara.

Holland’s clean and beautifully sustained flute coloration, in tandem with Ybarra’s tasteful collaboration on guitar, filled the room immediately with poignant, often touchingly funky Appalachian imagery in the opening set of the afternoon, six delightful movements from Robert Beaser’s Mountain Songs: A Cycle of American Folk Music (1985). The first, Barbara Allen, was unusually haunting, while The House Carpenter, a jolly tune, conjured busy tinkering with it’s flashy guitar licks. The bluesy Has You Bye and cocky Fair and Tender Ladies gave both artists opportunity to share ornate color concatenations, and the last of the set, Quicksilver, was just that: carefree and rollicksome, with an extensive solo riff for Ybarra and an irresistibly charming folk tune for Holland.

Beethoven’s Cello Sonata No. 5 in D Major, Op. 102, No. 2 (1815) resonated heroically in the bright acoustic of Weinman Hall, which optimized cellist Jacqueline Greenshields’ sweet, rich, and ample tone, particularly in the exquisitely expressive slow movement, Adagio con molto sentimento d’affetto. The fiercely temperamental last movement, Allegro fugato, spoke to the Napoleonic Age, which had clutched Europe and the world in tempest and turmoil for the better part of 30 years, but was winding down by 1815 with the Allied victory at Waterloo. Pianist Anne Weger was the very soul of collaboration throughout the performance, always present, ever discreet, abundant when needed.

It’s a treat to hear fresh new repertoire and Efrain Amaya’s intriguing three-movement Pre-sent for Flute and Cello (2009) inclined this listener to want to hear more of the young Venezuelan-American composer’s work. In three movements, Enamored, Disquiet, and Pas de Deux, the piece gripped the imagination and toyed, earnestly, with audience emotions. Engaging and powerful solo flute and cello soliloquies were the soul of the opening movement, Enamored, played with magnificent confidence and powerful intent by both artists. A film noir of threatening cello pizzicati and frenzied flute flutter-tonguing, churning fast-moving currents in the second movement, Disquiet, but the last, Pas de Deux, seemed to suggest, with a nod to contemporary Latin dance forms, that life goes on.

Infusing their playing with an aesthetic both sensual and sensational, including a soupçon of maudlin moodiness thrown in for good measure, the trio of Holland, Greenshields, and Weger concluded the afternoon with Bohuslav Martinu’s playful but worldly Trio for Flute, Cello, and Piano (1944).

Considering the year of composition, the first movement, Poco allegretto, is oddly coy, but Martinu’s crafty smile demands virtuoso playing, which the trio managed deftly. Fatalism is the subtext of the beautiful second movement, Adagio, and pianist Weger’s extensive opening solo was contemplative as well as resolute. Likewise, the touching flute cadenza that eventually exploded into the rhythmic vitality of the last movement, Andante - Allegretto scherzando. All three players blended with one another perfectly throughout, an altogether satisfying reading.

Daniel Kepl has been writing music, theatre, and dance reviews since he was a teenager. His professional expertise is as an orchestra conductor. He will conduct the Emeriti Philharmonic Orchestra during its tour of Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina in September 2016. To watch Daniel Kepl’s video interviews with California’s diverse arts community visit www.bravocalifornia.com