

Lifestyle

Concert review: Newburgh Chamber Music

By James F. Cotter

James F. Cotter

For the Times Herald-Record

For the Times Herald-Record

April 03, 2007 2:00 AM

Newburgh — Sunday afternoon at Calvary Presbyterian Church, Newburgh Chamber Music presented in its series another sonorously polished and varied program featuring soprano Karen Lubeck with pianist Jean Schneider, as well as the Hudson Valley Philharmonic String Quartet. With her beautifully modulated voice and glowing interpretations, Lubeck was the star of the program, singing poems set to music by Fauré and Barber with feeling and expression. The human voice is certainly the most rich and rewarding of all musical instruments, especially in an intimate setting of chamber music. The architectural grandeur and resonant acoustics of Calvary Church provided the perfect site for this spring concert.

The quartet, with violinists Carole Cowan and Maria Conti, violist Valentina Charlap-Evans and cellist Susan Seligman, began the concert with Haydn's Quartet in C Major, Opus 33, No. 3, "The Bird." From the first allegro tutti with its chirping grace notes and fluttering four-note theme, the duet of the scherzo repeats the birdsong in a lower register, echoed in the adagio in a slow and sweet cantabile. The finale is framed in a rondo that recapitulates the theme in a sprightly presto. The ensemble responses were expertly timed and interwoven with delicate balance and control.

Piano and quartet accompanied soprano Lubeck in presenting Fauré's "La Bonne Chanson," Opus 61, a setting for nine poems by Paul Verlaine. Blending romantic love, nature and tender emotion, Lubeck's French articulation caught the warmth of the originals, with their charming evocation of swanlike innocence, rising larks, quails and nightingales.

High notes announce sunrise and crescendos sound a wailing wind. Dramatic expectation of the lover yields to calm cadences of happy union. In the last poem, winter gives way to hope and spring in the soul.

After intermission, "Four Songs" by Samuel Barber, himself a trained singer, again featured Lubeck, accompanied by pianist Schneider. Gerard Manley Hopkins' lyric "A Nun Takes the Veil" is already musical with its sprung rhythm and imagery. Its sensitive spirituality contrasts with W. B. Yeats' "The Secrets of the Old" with its quick tempo and saucy sexuality. James Agee's "Sure on This Shining Night" with its mysterious solitude and Frederic Prokosch's "Nocturne" with its longing for love offer another contrast with the singer rendered with genuine emotion.

Mozart's Piano Quartet in G minor proved the piano a real match for the three strings. The strongly accented measures of the allegro, followed by rippling keyboard-led arpeggios, shifted to the melodic lines of the andante, placid and sensuous, and concluded with trills and a decorative rondo in a confident crescendo. Throughout, the musicians performed with persistent clarity and ornamentation.