

Washington Musica Viva at The Dennis & Phillip Ratner Museum, 5/23/2006

Another winning concert from WMV... Opened with Bach's Cantata No. 82 - sung beautifully by Gary Poster. It was done as a chamber piece - one player per part, which created a gorgeous kind of intimacy. Soprano saxophone was substituted for oboe, which really worked nicely. Rhonda Buckley played it beautifully. Her soprano sax playing has a warm, rich tone that blended nicely with the strings - a much more luxurious sound than an oboe. I hope they made a recording - I wish I could link to an mp3 so you can hear how that worked...

Next up, Faure's La Bonne Chanson. As I've written before, I'm not such a huge fan of classical vocal music, but this piece is an exception to my rule (and now I can add Cantata no. 82 to that list as well - seems like anything Gary Poster sings winds up on my growing list of exceptions). Mezzo soprano Karyn Friedman delivered a rock solid performance - teetering on the edge of losing control, just as the poems are. I think this is the first time I've heard this set of songs done by a female voice? Well, it works just fine that way. The ensemble was excellent (string quartet and piano).

After intermission (where all of Cameron's cookies were enthusiastically devoured), we heard Ernest Bloch's Piano Quintet #1. It was given an energetic and convincing performance, but I wasn't really won over by the piece. Lots of homophonic string writing, there were very few sections where the strings really got to function independently of one another. There were a small handful of "modern" elements and effects, but overall it sounds pretty conservative to me. I think that might be my hang-up with Bloch's work overall... it's not "modern" enough to be interesting for unique sounds and textures, and not conservative enough to stand up as "neo-classical" either. The quintet certainly has its moments, but I felt like it's a bit longer than it needs to be. That being said, the performance was super. Carl Banner (piano) was joined by Sally McLain (violin), June Huang (violin), Betty Hauck (viola), and Amy Leung (cello).

Jon Morris