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Sunday, September 21, 2014

Child prodigies' compositions are played by polished pros in Worcester



Worcester Chamber Music Society violinist Krista Buckland Reisner, left, performs Mendelssohn's "String Quintet No. 1 in A major" during the Wunderkind! Tom Keil Memorial Concert at the First Baptist Church Saturday. (T&G Staff/STEVE LANAVA)

By Joyce Tamer **TELEGRAM & GAZETTE REVIEWER**

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WORCESTER — Wunderkind! A child prodigy!

Musically, one thinks immediately of Mozart. In the first concert of its ninth season, the Worcester Chamber Music Society explored the music of Mozart and two other composers who excelled in music at an early age.

Music of Mendelssohn and Glazunov as well as Mozart was heard in the concert, held Saturday evening in the First Baptist Church. The same program had been performed Thursday at the Congregational Church in Grafton.

The arched walls of Gordon Hall and the chairs arranged in circular fashion close to the performers created a faux salon designed for chamber music.



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The intimate seating arrangement provided every member of the audience the opportunity to see a performer's face while enjoying the integrated sound of the group as a whole.

The "Flute Quartet No. 4 in A major" by Mozart opened the program. The first movement in theme and variation form was light and airy and gave each member of the quartet the opportunity to play the theme, introduced by flutist Tracy Kraus. The menuetto second movement was a graceful dance followed by a concluding rollicking rondeau. Kraus played splendidly, as did David Russell, Peter Sulski and Ariana Falk in a delightful and charming performance.

The "String Quintet No. 1" in A by Mendelssohn propelled us from the Classical into the Romantic era and from the light airiness of the Mozart into intense Romanticism.

This Quintet makes extraordinary demands on the performers, and the Society members rose to the challenge with a display of formidable technical skills.

The third movement, scherzo, is a high-speed chase in perpetual motion, and the fourth movement is similarly technically challenging. Both were stunningly executed by Krista Buckland Reisner, Rohan Gregory, Sulski, Russell and guest artist Marcus Thompson.

There were minor intonation problems in the first violins in the rapid passages, and guest violist Marcus Thompson's sound was not always full and intense enough to be in balance with the rest of the quintet, but the society gave a thrilling reading of the piece, eliciting a standing ovation.

This concert was the Tom Keil Memorial Concert, and after intermission three members of the society offered gentle, humorous and warm reminiscences of their friend.

Though less well-known than Mozart and Mendelssohn, Alexander Glazunov was also a child prodigy. His "First Symphony" was performed when he was only 17; he studied with Rimsky-Korsakov and had the admiration of the other members of the Russian Five who preceded him.

Glazunov lived almost twice as long as either Mozart or Mendelssohn, but he stopped composing when he was only 41 years old, leaving 30 years without using his composing skills.

The society gave a sweeping, Romantic reading of his "String Quintet in A," reveling in the lush harmonies and contrasting sections in each of the movements. The second movement, scherzo, was particularly interesting with its predominance of pizzicato sections alternating with legato episodes. In the third movement an uncharacteristic missed harmonic by Russell hardly detracted from the overall excellence of the playing.

Through the years the Chamber Music Society has crafted thoughtful, innovative and interesting programs, and its playing has become so effortless, so technically virtuosic and so musically expressive that though we can't claim them as wunderkinds, they have become one of the most loved and admired treasures in our musical community.

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