



from Young Concert Artists
The Washington Times

By Terry Ponick Sunday, October 24, 2010

Caroline Goulding impresses at the Terrace

Washington -- The Young Concert Artists Series launched its 32nd Washington DC season in the nation's capitol Friday evening with an eclectic recital by young American violinist Caroline Goulding, whose program ranged from Tartini to Corigliano. Her Terrace Theater performance, ably accompanied by pianist Shuai Wang, was co-presented under the auspices of the Washington Performing Arts Society's Kreeger String Series.

Attired, appropriately, in a stunning red gown, Ms. Goulding began her program with a performance of John Corigliano's "Red Violin Caprices." Penned in 1999 as part of the score for François Girard's eponymous film about a seemingly cursed instrument and the largely tragic lives it touches, the caprices are said by the composer to underline its key plot elements.

Unlike some of Corigliano's more challenging modernist scores, the Caprices—performed without accompaniment—are tonal, melodic, and anchored in Romantic sensibilities. Ms. Goulding gave them a spirited reading, thoughtfully dwelling on some of the work's quieter moments while speeding through its gypsy-like dance moments with considerable abandon.

As if to embellish on the Corigliano, Ms. Goulding next offered Ottorino Respighi's "Sonata in B minor for violin and piano." This edgy, interesting composition is quite a surprise for those familiar only with this 20th century composer's popular orchestral tone poems such as the "Pines of Rome" or with his low-key transcriptions/adaptations of ancient Italian music.

In this Sonata, Respighi, usually easy in his preferred late-Romantic idiom, surprises with rather daring excursions into the realm of extended tonality, the innovative, post-Romantic road taken by Korngold, Zemlinsky, and others as an alternative to harsh sounds characteristic of Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School.

The Sonata, not often performed on these shores, is a crackerjack virtuoso piece containing loads of complex, challenging passages for the violin, all of which Ms. Goulding handled with the greatest of ease. The music is intellectually challenging as well, and Ms. Goulding often, though not always, was able to discover this inner core.



Caroline Goulding in performance
(Photo credit: Gary Adams)

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An added bonus in the Respighi is the fact that it's specifically written for violin AND piano. While the violin does play the dominant role, the piano portion of the work, part accompaniment, part virtuosic, places considerable demands upon the pianist. Ms. Wang displayed considerable skill here, moving behind the violinist when required, but bursting forth with passion and skill when the score called for it. The talent of both artists united to make the Respighi, arguably, the surprise musical highlight of the evening.

However, after a brief intermission, Ms. Goulding and Ms. Wang reappeared to offer a second half that, if intellectually less thought-provoking, was, musically, both tuneful and virtuosic.

And speaking of virtuosic—the program's second half commenced with Tartini's notoriously difficult "Violin Sonata in G minor," aka, the "Devil's Trill." This well-known composition is notable for the fiendish and seemingly endless series of tricky trills that dominate roughly the final third of this sonata, which, as legend would have it, were somehow mysteriously transmitted to Tartini by the devil himself.

In any event, the "Devil's Trill" sonata is not infrequently offered in today's debut recitals as a way for the violinist to prove his or her chops. If that was Ms. Goulding's intent Friday evening, she certainly passed the Devil's challenge with flying colors.

Ms. Goulding and Ms. Wang next easily breezed into two of Brahms' "Hungarian Dances," No. 1 in G minor and No. 7 in A major. Although an ethnic German hailing from Hamburg, Brahms early on was smitten by Hungarian gypsy music, incorporating its sound, attitudes, and moods into a series of orchestral and solo-based dance pieces that remain wildly popular around the world, even today.

Catchy, romantic, melancholy, happy, and sad, the dances are expressive of many moods. Ms. Goulding was particularly good at picking up on their playful aspects, and her approach to these sometimes over-played works was light, earnest, and yet quite expressive.

Wrapping up the evening's program, Ms. Goulding first cleansed the musical palate, as it were, with a thoughtful performance of Tchaikovsky's wistful "Mélodie in E-flat major for violin and piano," Op. 42, No. 3. She concluded with a delightful interpretation of selections from contemporary American composer Paul Schoenfield's 1989 "Four Souvenirs."



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The first of these “Souvenir” selections, entitled “Tin Pan Alley,” was a pleasant riff on the show music of yesteryear that seemed to pay a bittersweet, nostalgic tribute to those melancholy moments on a late-evening dance floor in a bygone era. Both violinist and pianist seemed to grasp its wraith-like appeal. The second selection, entitled “Square Dance” was a get-down hoe-down, a rhythmic, frantically-paced whirling dervish virtuoso piece that provided Ms. Goulding with a dazzling way to wrap up an already impressive evening.

The enthusiastic audience wanted more, and both artists complied with a brief, slippery, almost naughty encore of George Gershwin’s memorable tune, “It Ain’t Necessarily So,” the signature song of sleazy “Sportin’ Life” in the composer’s Porgy and Bess. Arranged by Jascha Heifetz for violin and piano, it was an antic way to end a super recital with a wink and a promise of more appearances to come.