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In performance: Duo Alterno

Web-only review:



Husband-wife team offers fine contemporary Italian program
by Joan Reinthaler



Levine School of Music's intimate Sallie Mae Hall under the auspices of the Italian Cultural Institute on Monday.

Songs filled the first half -- a group of four popular tunes in graceful and transparent settings by Luciano Berio, three atmospheric and colorful love songs by David Froom in their first Washington performances and, by Piacentini himself, a lovely and lyrical evocation of the wonders of Galileo's contemplation of the universe, for piano and computerized sound.

(read more after the jump)

And "Gestures," or perhaps theater or even sound effects, best describes the rest of the program. Marcello Abbado's erotic "Vocalizzo" had Scandaletti singing into the raised lid of the piano (or at least making increasingly aroused-sounding noises) as she plucked its strings. Two volunteers from the audience were enlisted to hold out the 12 feet or so of the pictorially notated score of Cathy Berberian's "Stripsody," while Scandaletti, moving from stage left to stage right, made popping, grunting and sneezing sounds and myriad other noises that might be suggested by the comic strips. She did this magnificently, even managing to sound like a Brooklyn babe for a snide comment or two.

Sylvano Bussotti's "Lachrimae" ("Tears") had Scandaletti again singing into the piano, but this time, with the pedal depressed, evoking sympathetic vibrations from its strings. The piano had been laced with long colored ribbons and, as tensions mounted, these were torn from the instrument's guts -- a little hokey, especially since neither program notes nor translations had been provided, so the significance of all this

"Songs and Gestures in a Musical Space" was the supremely apt title of the program that Duo Alterno (the husband-and-wife team of pianist/composer Riccardo Piacentini and soprano Tiziana Scandaletti) brought to the

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had to be inferred from the piece's title.

This was a well-rehearsed, smoothly executed program, and both Piacentini and Scandaletti are pros, both as musicians and as actors. Scandaletti has a big voice -- too big for that low-ceilinged hard-surfaced hall -- and she might have scaled it back, particularly for the songs of the first half, but she projected both humor and theatricality vividly. Piacentini played with restraint, close attention to balance and, where needed, with a fine sense of comedic timing.

-- Joan Reinthaler

By Anne Midgette | March 31, 2010; 5:56 AM ET
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