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## The Boston Musical Intelligencer

### Jammin' and Groovin' on Sandy Bay

By Seth Botos, July 7, 2014

Richard Stoltzman

***“The Stoltzmans displayed great virtuosity, especially apparent in their solo performances. Johann Sebastian Bach’s Chromatic Fantasy in D Minor, arranged by Richard, showcased his amazing clarity, control, and expressiveness on the clarinet. One passage featured a seemingly endless stream of ascending arpeggios, executed effortlessly at light speed. The opening of “Carynx” by Romanian composer Serban Nichifor was equally impressive, a lightning fast run from low to high that seems to utilize the entire tonal and dynamic range of the instrument”***

Shalin Liu Performance Center’s beautiful backdrop was perfect for clarinetist Richard Stoltzman, and marimbaist Mika Yoshida Stoltzman and their program *Bach to the Future!*. On the picture-perfect Sunday, the hall was jammed.

Both musicians were in good-natured and good-humored form. Richard Stoltzman joined the audience in admiring the view and over the course of the evening recounted several humorous stories of how some of the selections came to be. Many pieces the duo performed were composed or arranged specifically for them, including *Irish Spirit* by Bill Douglas, “The Nymphs” by John Zorn, *Kalushar* For Solo Marimba by Serban Nichifor, *Crescent Moon*, *Let Me Love You* by Matthew Tommasini, *Mostly Blues* [Selections] by William Thomas McKinley, and *Marika Groove* by Chick Corea. Mika Stoltzman apparently demanded, “John Zorn, write me a piece!” during an uninvited visit to that composer’s home. Serban Nichifor sent her *Kalushar*, a world premier at this performance, for free after the two had connected on Facebook. **Their joyful attitude was evident in their playing as well. Both were animated and smiling for the duration of the concert, with Mika occasionally stomping on the floor of the stage with enthusiasm.**

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**transitioning from a four-four time signature to a nine-eight and back.** During the world premiere, *Kalushar*, she was **frantically leaping from the high to the low notes all the while maintaining perfect control of her dynamics, suddenly piano, suddenly forte.** And although I am a percussionist myself, **I will also forever be amazed by the marimbist's ability to play complex harmony with four mallets in two hands, and Mika continually contorted her hands and arms in an incredible manner to form chords.**

**The duo was also able to demonstrate their sensitivity on their instruments and simpatico with each other.** The opening piece *Irish Spirit* by Bill Douglas began lightly, with a lovely clarinet melody over the marimba's supporting, sustained chords. While Mika had to utilize rolls to sustain the harmony, **it was played so beautifully that you could imagine it as a pad on a synthesizer.** The second movement was joyful and up-tempo, and the musicians played masterfully together, with the melodies in unison and then weaving in and around each other. *Wings* by Toru Takemitsu and *Crescent Moon, Let Me Love You* by Matthew Tommasini also demonstrated their ability to create a sentimental mood.

**The highlight of the evening, however, was witnessing their amazing versatility and crossover ability.** They played a number of Bach's Two Part Inventions, starting off quite conventionally, the clarinet playing one line and the marimba the other. Soon they began adding their own flair to each one, beginning with Richard, who slid jazzily up to a high, sustained note. During another, YMika commenced by playing with the wooden back ends of the mallets and ended by playing with one back end and one soft end, creating a lovely stuttering effect. The "Tango Suite" by Astor Piazzolla began and ended with Mika stomping and clapping along with the clarinet's melody. *Mostly Blues* [Selections] by William Thomas McKinley was the first selection in which **the duo showed-off their jazz abilities—the clarinet playing a delightful, mischievous melody while the marimba comped in excellent rhythm.** It truly was "mostly" blues, as the form was twisted and molded to suit the composer's desires. An old friend of Richard Stoltzman, McKinley happened to be in attendance. At the end of the piece, the performer asked the composer, "Are you happy?" to which McKinley replied that he found the performance splendid. He mentioned that they nailed the rhythm, finishing, "...I could go on." As a musician I know how fulfilling it can be to receive a composer's praise, so this was a fun moment. They even livened up Maurice Ravel's *Pavane Duo*, jazzing up the middle with a comped marimba groove and swinging bended notes from the clarinet.

For the culmination of the evening Ippei Ichimaru on upright bass and Christian Moran on drum kit joined the Stoltzmans to perform *Marika Groove* by the great Chick Corea. Richard said that the composer, most commonly known as a pianist, had also loved the drums from a young age and felt that the marimba was a bridge between the two. Mika's only request was for Corea to "Please write groove," and groove they did! The four movements "kinda in a jazz way" began with a slow "cantation", breaking into a downright funky groove before a rubato clarinet solo and another, almost Caribbean, groove section. **Each member of the quartet improvised magnificently,** and I especially enjoyed one section where the clarinet and bass played in unison, with the drums and marimba following suit. **Richard and Mika Yoshida Stoltzman proved they are masters of their instruments no matter the style of music.**

The first encore a "marimba rap" song called "Everybody Talk About Freedom" by Julie Spencer was occasioned by the first standing ovation. The Stoltzmans traded verses, with some in Japanese, and included the audience, having us yell "What, what?" This was followed by another standing ovation by a clearly appreciative audience. I left feeling that there can be great joy, skill, and innovation in any genre

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of music, with any instrumentation. **When Richard and Mika Yoshida Stoltzman return to the area I cannot wait to see what new exciting and inventive ideas they have in store.**

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