

The Aesthetic Adventure

Cultural Resources for the Upper West Side's 99%

Tuesday, March 3, 2015

Jupiter Symphony Players Perform Milhaud, Dvořák, Gershwin and Henry Hadley

At yesterday afternoon's matinee at Good Shepherd Church, the Jupiter Symphony Players performed a program entitled *The New World* that included chamber works by American composers as well as Europeans who were at one time or another resident in this country. The artists featured included Milhaud, Dvořák, Gershwin and Hadley.

The program opened with George Gershwin's *Lullaby* (circa 1919 but not premiered in its original form until 1967). This was Gershwin's earliest "classical" work, actually a composition assignment from his harmony teacher Edward Kilenyi, Sr. Gershwin later used the piece as the basis for an aria, "Has Anyone Seen My Joe?" in the 1922 opera *Blue Monday*. (Though the opera itself, part of *George White's Scandals*, was a failure, it was heard by Paul Whiteman who thereupon gave Gershwin the commission for *Rhapsody in Blue*.) In spite of its origin as "serious" music, this subdued work did not entirely abandon the popular idiom for which Gershwin was already known. It was simple, very obviously a learning exercise, and pleasant enough to hear..

Following this came Earl Wild's *Étude* on Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm" (1973), one of his *Seven Virtuoso Études on Popular Songs*. During his lifetime, Wild was an extraordinarily successful American pianist and known for his transcriptions not only of Gershwin's work but also that of other composers, including Rachmaninoff. His long association with Gershwin's music began in 1942 when he was invited by Toscanini to perform *Rhapsody in Blue* with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. While I thought the present transcription interesting, I much preferred the improvisation on the same Gershwin number I had heard in January at Juilliard's Chamberfest.

The next work was Henry Hadley's Piano Quintet in A minor, Op. 50 (1919). It's hard to believe now, so completely has he been forgotten, that Hadley was once among the most prominent and highly respected American composers. He was also an associate conductor to the New York Philharmonic as well as the first American composer to conduct his own work, *Cleopatra's Night*, at the Met Opera. It was the Romantic nature of Hadley's own music, along with his admiration for Wagner, that proved his downfall as popular taste changed. This quintet was very much in the style of Brahms and even at the time it was first performed must have seemed something of an anachronism.

After intermission, the ensemble played Darius Milhaud's Suite for Clarinet, Violin and Piano, Op. 157b (1936). Milhaud, a member of the group of Parisian composers referred to as Les Six, was incredibly prolific; at the time of his death in 1974 he had more than four hundred opus numbers to his credit. This piece was adapted from incidental music Milhaud had written for a play by Jean Anouilh entitled *Le voyageur sans bagage* ("The Traveler without Luggage"). Despite the Baroque titles of its four movements, its sound was clearly indebted to jazz. Indeed, Milhaud had been deeply influenced by jazz ever since he had traveled to New York City in 1922 and visited Harlem; at one point in the 1940's he even had pianist Dave Brubeck as a student.

The final work on the program was Antonín Dvořák's String Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96 (1893) nicknamed the "American." This is perhaps the most famous of Dvořák's chamber works and justly so. It is a beautifully lyrical piece the composer wrote while on vacation in Iowa during his stay in America and has quite a different sound from the music he composed in his native country. Here he was no longer using Czech folk tunes as a source of inspiration but rather the Afro-American spirituals to which he had been introduced by Harry Burleigh in New York City. It was this association that led directly to Dvořák's employment of the pentatonic scale at the beginning of each of the quartet's four movements. The four musicians - Francisco Fullana, violin; Lisa Shihoten, violin; Erika Gray, viola; and David Requiro, cello - yesterday gave an excellent performance that elicited a strong emotional response from the audience, myself included.

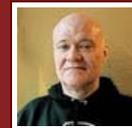
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About Me



Frank McAdam

I'm an "old school" black & white film photographer who's now actively pursuing a second career as a writer.

My first novel, *New York Sonata*, and my most recent photo book, *Pictorialist Models*, are now available as ebooks on both Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

I'm fourth generation NYC Irish. I was born in Brooklyn, graduated from Fordham University in the Bronx, and have been located for many years on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

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