

Jay Harvey Upstage

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Loving surface as well as depth: Silver medalist of the 2006 IVCI graces the Laureate Series at the Indiana History Center

A satisfying program has to be measured by how satisfyingly it is performed. By that measure, Simone Lamsma's recital with pianist Rohan De Silva Tuesday night was entirely successful.

The 2006 silver medalist of the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis was presented by that organization in music of Dvorak, Mendelssohn, Part, and Schumann at the Indiana History Center.

Lamsma's sound and assertiveness acquired prominence as the concert proceeded. Across that spectrum, she almost always made the right interpretive choices. Her projection was well-defined without becoming coarse, and the partnership with De Silva was exemplary from the start.

The work that first emphasized shifts of dominance from one instrument to the other was Mendelssohn's Sonata in F major. Lamsma and De Silva smoothly exchanged the Allegro vivace movement's material, rising to an intense yet gracefully brought-off climax at the end. In the Adagio, more expressive warmth was evident from the violin, making up for a deficit in that quality in the last of Dvorak's "Four Romantic Pieces," which opened the concert.

The finale was launched at a blistering pace, but neither artist seemed in danger of getting burned. The partnership held steady, and the performance retained some of the coolness that always seems to run through Mendelssohn's music, usually to its advantage.

In fact, by intermission the Laureate Series program had taken on an attractive quality of promising deeper rewards thereafter, having surveyed music with attractive surfaces in the first half. The Dvorak set presented simple, straightforward pieces without jarring contrasts. Lamsma's tone was mellow, sort of woody in a good sense, a bit clarinetlike. The reflective quality of the pieces stayed uppermost. The Mendelssohn sonata is brighter, more facile, somewhat surfacy — but calling upon technical panache and suggesting a wider emotional range.

With Arvo Pärt's "Fratres" — the Estonian composer's most popular work, which he's fashioned in several versions — we get into deeper territory. The title, using a French word to denote monks ("brothers") in procession or perhaps contemplation, opens up vistas that don't depend on any particular pictorial or religious significance. It is clear, the way the rhythmic and harmonic planes of the compositions are arranged, that both agitation and Alpha-wave calm are to be encompassed by the performers. Even in the feverish string crossings of the unaccompanied violin prelude, ecstasy is foreshadowed.

Pärt has compared the work's effect to "light going through a prism," and the light metaphor suggests what "Fratres" has in common with Schumann's Sonata in D minor, op. 121, which ended the program. Both works are inward-looking, but communicate effectively enough to allow even the unprepared listener inside. Illumination is sought from a source available to all of us, but immediately available in these works as if prismatically.

In Wallace Stevens' late poem "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," the first stanza runs: "Light the first light of evening, as in a room / In which we rest, and for small reason, think / The world imagined is the ultimate good." As Lamsma's playing attained special brilliance through the crucible of

"Fratres," in the Schumann the radiance was vividly shared in what, again borrowing from Stevens, felt like "the intensest rendezvous."

The third movement, with its intimate pizzicato opening, unfolded in this performance in a distinctly narrative manner, full of character, tension-and-release and other hints of storytelling — so close to the indelible nature of this most literary of major composers. I liked the well-knit achievement of all four movements; when the music was fast, the momentum was urgent and controlled.

Schumann suffered from increasingly severe bipolar disorder, but even late in life could occasionally put his demons under a common harness. Lamsma and De Silva demonstrated that he does so in this work, letting his "interior paramour" exert her charms just as strikingly as Part does from a firmer spiritual center in "Fratres."

What a spellbinding experience — worth leaving aside any further words from me and turning to the conclusion of Stevens' poem:

*Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough.*

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