

<http://jayharveyupstage.blogspot.com/2014/02/the-international-violin-competition-of.html>

Wednesday, February 19, 2014

The International Violin Competition of Indianapolis puts charming musical partnership on the Indiana History Center stage

Augustin Hadelich, gold medalist in the 2006 International Violin Competition of Indianapolis, has made good on the award in many ways. One of them is the conspicuous variety of musical contexts in which he appears that do much more than put himself on the touring-virtuoso pedestal.

With the Spanish guitarist Pablo Sainz Villegas, he has recorded a disc named for the finale in a program the IVCI presented Tuesday night at the Indiana History Center, "Histoire du Tango." And Sainz Villegas and Hadelich have a multimedia recital in the works (adding pianist Joyce Yang) for the Kennedy Center in April called "Tango, Song, and Dance."

For the near-capacity audience here, the guitarist and violinist displayed duo sensitivity of a kind that could have you thinking they'd been performing together for decades, but both musicians, in their 30s, are way too young. The repertoire leans toward the slight side, but when the partnership is as simpatico as this one, a lofty musical stature is achieved.

Taking the last piece first, Astor Piazzolla's "Histoire du Tango" is a four-movement tone poem in which the raw, simple dance form that emerged in the brothels of turn-of-the-20th-century Argentina goes through different stages of sophistication to end up as contemporary concert music. And much of that development can be credited to the composer of this piece.

It's a deft excursion through the characteristic dance form, with witty commentary on the social uses of the genre. Something elemental in the first movement ("Bordel 1900"), with the guitarist tapping out rhythms on his instrument in likely imitation of dancers' feet, conveyed its lowest-common-denominator appeal. By the time the tango moves to "Cafe 1930," there's an emphasis on lyricism and a setting conducive to conversation.

That's a far cry from the brittle sophistication depicted in "Nightclub 1960," where the need for tango musicians to penetrate the haze of well-lubricated chatter and anticipated hook-ups is displayed. The finale, depicting tango in today's concert-hall setting, had Hadelich and Sainz Villegas exhibiting their tango rapport in the disjunctive phrases and rhythmic displacements of high-art modernism.

The program also included solo showcases for both musicians. Hadelich's was the formidable sixth Sonata for Solo Violin by Eugene Ysaye, whose music is well-known among IVCI followers because the competition's founder, Josef Gingold, was a student of the Belgian violinist-composer. It was the program's most removed from the cultural and sound world of the guitar, yet not without some links to that world.

Hadelich made the most of the connection. Often one hears performances that emphasize the rigorous accents and virtuoso cragginess of the music, as in the flawless rendition by 1986 IVCI silver medalist Leonidas Kavakos on his debut CD. But Hadelich found the sensuous through-line in the piece, including its Latinesque playfulness. That aspect is centered in the score's "Allegretto

poco scherzando" section, which relaxes into a habanera rhythm. The performance overall was enchanting.

The program's only living composer, Tunisian Roland Dyens, was represented by a droll guitar solo ("Tango en Skai") meant to seem offhand but probably quite difficult to bring off technically. Its frequently shifting sonorities — stopped chords placed adjacent to ringing ones, filigree next to plangent melodies — were projected with clear articulation and interpretive aplomb.

Sainz Villegas earlier held the audience spellbound with Joaquin Rodrigo's "Invocacion y Danza." The first part was a haunting recitative with crystal-clear harmonics; the concluding dance presented a flurry of infectious rhythms and tremolo-laden tunes.

The concert opened with five of Manuel de Falla's "Seven Popular Spanish Songs," in which the duo's well-honed collaborative spirit was demonstrated. The piano is usually heard accompanying the violin in performances of this music, but Tuesday's performance showed how rooted in guitar characteristics is Falla's writing for keyboard. Especially fetching was Hadelich and Sainz Villegas' hushed reading of the lullaby, "Nana."

Niccolo Paganini initially studied the mandolin before becoming the first outsized virtuoso in violin history, and he wrote naturally for the guitar. Sonata Concertata in A major is one of several of his works for violin and guitar. It's rooted in his temperamentally conservative nature as a composer, though as a performer he paved the way for everything associated with musical romanticism. It was typical of this duo's polish that the lighthearted nature of the music was emphasized without trivializing the composition. It seemed altogether natural that the artists would turn to Paganini once again for their encore, "Cantabile."