

The Catskill Chronicle

The Heart of the Catskills

July 16, 2010



Weekend of Chamber Music (WCM) and Monticello High School (MHS) colleagues, 2009: Leonard Hindell WCM, Nancy Wegrzyn MHS, Ann Trombley MHS, Judith Pearce WCM, Allen Blustine WCM.

By Barry Plaxen

Now in its 17th year of bringing fine music to Sullivan County, Weekend of Chamber Music (WCM) once again began its Summer Music Festival with a free concert on the shaded lawn of the First Presbyterian Church in Jeffersonville on July 11, accompanied by fair weather, low humidity, pleasant temperatures and a “full lawn” of music lovers.

WCM Artistic Director, Judith Pearce, is a ‘programmer-extraordinaire’ and this opening concert validates that fact. Generally, her programs include solely classical music, but this concert included songs from Broadway and Tin Pan Alley interspersed with choice classical music, performed by a woodwind quintet and vocalists.

The opening selection was Gershwin’s “Summertime”. But leave it to Pearce to make this song/aria we have all heard a gazillion times performed in a unique manner. It was arranged for wind quintet BUT including bass clarinet and English horn – and more about that later. BUT – Pearce assigned the singing to baritone David Trombley, affording our ears a different and most uplifting sound along with an incredible “expansion” of the aria’s potential. Imagine the classic lullaby sung by a father! Quite a difference.

That wonderful new ‘version’ of the “Porgy and Bess” aria was followed by Samuel Barber’s “Summer Music”, a favorite of mine, with its first melody reminiscent of Barber’s lyrical “Knoxville: Summer of 1915”. A very modern and lyrical piece, it was originally commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Detroit. BUT the Society had no one patron able to underwrite the commission, so many people contributed modest amounts, some as little as one dollar. Barber hoped this method of commissioning works might catch on and encourage local composers BUT it has yet to do so, as far as I know.

Also performed was Irving Fine's "Partita for Wind Quintet". Less lyrical than Barber's piece, it offered numerous rhythms and syncopations containing what seemed to be quite difficult passages, especially for the bassoon, which were handled as expected by world class bassoonist Leonard Hindell, a regular WCM performer and mentor in the WCM / Monticello High School student chamber music program.

Perhaps not the way Pearce meant it to be, since she is a music programmer, the rest of the program listed songs by composer George Gershwin and composer Cole Porter. BUT, no – not highly melodic musical works such as "But Not For Me" (Gershwin) or "In The Still Of the Night" (Porter). It turned out that what Pearce actually selected were songs which depicted the genius of lyricist Ira Gershwin and lyricist Cole Porter.

All the songs sung were English language gems: puns, rhymes, verbal sparring, clever references to 30s celebrities, satire, etc., and in this case the music was secondary to the words. And the audience ate up the humor, cleverness, patter and delightful vocal deliveries of soloists and duettists David Trombley and Annie Hat.

The accompanying world class quintet, flutist Judith Pearce, oboe/English hornist Matt Sullivan, clarinet(s) Pavel Vinnitsky, French hornist Daniel Grabois and bassoonist Leonard Hindell owed much to one of Sullivan's musical marvels, Nancy Wegrzyn, whose arranging skills were very evident. For this particular concert, she created fitting and clever musical settings for the serious and humorous songs, i.e., a soft soothing accompaniment to "Summertime", the use of a clarinet solo playing the melody along with the singer for "Brush Up Your Shakespeare" which surprisingly made the song funnier, and – my favorite moment – a great oboe & flute slide followed by an off-pitch note after a wave-rocking section to simulate nausea for a humorous Porter song. Wegrzyn's (pronounced Weg-rin) magical quintet arrangements managed to add much to the songs and gave a welcome freshness to those (i.e., "I Got Rhythm") that were well known.

The world class WCM concerts continue on July 16, 17, 22, 23, and 24, with great classical music and great instrumentalists and great musicologists thanks to Pearce's programming expertise. Some live Bartok & de Falla music in Sullivan County!!, along with Haydn & Debussy, etc. BUT – also the Sullivan premiere of an innovative baroque composer, Jean-Fery Rebel. www.WCMconcerts.org.