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Colorful 20th-century musical extravaganza pleases Mello crowd

Mar 19 2004 12:00AM By

By JOSEF SEKON

FOR THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

On Saturday, the Pajaro Valley Performing Arts Association Artist in Residence Program presented virtuoso guitarist Mesut Ozgen and friends in an exciting evening of 20th-century contemporary classical music.

The two hours of musical variety, visual art and talented guest musicians must be applauded for two main reasons. First, the needed exposure of serious 20th-century art music composed in our immediate time frame including local composers. Second, the impressive high level of musicianship, artistry and professionalism performed by Mesut and guest artists Deepak Ram, Lauren Rasmussen and Annette Bauer.

The accompanying images by visual artists Gustavo Vasquez and Peter Elsea, along with scenic/lighting design and stage choreography by David Lee Cuthbert, created a spectacular overall multimedia event reminiscent of "New Music Glory Days," which took place in the 1970s and '80s in such avant-garde centers as the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and UC San Diego at La Jolla, where internationally known household legends as John Cage, Salvatore Martirano and Roger Reynolds created wonderful musically artistic experiences that influenced, changed and continue to influence music and the thoughts of young composers and artists to this day.

Ozgen is an intelligent, creative, well-traveled musical artist with impeccable understanding of technique, musical structure and detail of melodic line in roles both as soloist and accompanist. It is perfectly clear that Mesut will rise to the very top in the field of world-renowned, highly respected guitarists.

The concert was varied and lengthy and consisted of works by the prolific young composer Christopher Pratorius, UCSC music faculty; Robert Strizich, Cal State University at Fresno music faculty; Pablo Ortiz, UC Davis music faculty; Robert Beaser, Juillard music faculty; Anthony Newman, keyboard wizard; Anthony Gilbert, British composer; Carlo Domeniconi, Music Academy of Berlin faculty; Deepak Ram, UCSC music faculty; and well-known guitarist/composer Benjamin Verdery.

Each of the compositions performed offered interesting musical ideas that were executed with good musical taste and professionalism.

The second work of the evening by Strizich, written for Mesut, was La Guitarra

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for soprano, guitar and percussion. The text is one section of a longer poem written in 1921 by Federico Garcia Lorca.

The percussion consisted of three wine glasses, which, appropriately filled to the correct pitch and with the appropriate libation, allowed soprano Rasmussen not only to demonstrate her beautiful voice, but also to play the three assigned pitches of the wine glasses by rotating a moistened finger around the outer rim as one does with a bowl gong. Mesut's accompaniment was sensitive and well balanced in proportion to Lauren's vocal lines.

As a passing note of interest, several composers who attended the concert, as well as myself, were under the impression that in works such as Estudio and Gigue, the rapid, kaleidoscopic visual images projected in back of the performers, as impressive as they were, to a degree masked the overall musical experience.

The first work after the intermission was Stars for Recorder and Guitar by Gilbert. This work took as its point of reference a wood engraving by Mauritis Escher. The work, as described by the composer, consisted of nine elements related but extremely contrasted. It featured a number of textures consisting of high-level whistle tones, multiphonics (two or more notes played simultaneously by the recorder) and effective harmonic pizzicatti by the guitarist.

The work Variations on an Anatolian Folk Song composed by Domeniconi was the only work of the evening that featured Turkish folk music. The theme is a famous song written by the famous and influential Turkish folk musician Asik Veysel (1894-1973), who was a troubadour in his own right, singing his own poetry and playing the saz. Mesut realized and negotiated the complex improvisatory lines of this work with great creativity and style.

Perhaps the most awaited work of the evening was Surya composed by Ram for bansuri and guitar, Ram's first work that included himself as a performer. Surya is one of the many Indian names for the sun, and the bansuri is a wooden flute used by Indian flautists.

The work is based entirely on a south Indian raga known as Kirwani and consists of seven short movements, each of which emulates an element of Indian music.

Both artist musicians were released from any confines of previous works and pursued their greatest improvisatory musical desires and appetites. The beautifully expressive breathy sound produced by Deepak's bansuri was spectacular. His breath control, articulation, fantastic subtle phrase endings and spectacular rhythmic lines based on rhythms usually associated with tabla playing were musically creative, expressive and spellbinding. Mesut participated in no less spectacular fashion, and all present knew that both musicians enjoyed the wonderful moment.

This was an evening that showcased in brilliant fashion many of the creative artists who live in our community, and we eagerly await their next musical return.

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