

MUSIC REVIEW: SUMMER CONCERT BAND, FESTIVAL CHAMBER PLAYERS

Two concerts make for busy Wednesday

By Peter Jacobi
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The solution seems so simple. On those July evenings when the Summer Concert Band plays at 7 and the Festival Chamber Players perform at 8, there's always an overlap of ten to 15 minutes. And the folks who want to attend both events find themselves choosing either to leave the band concert early or to arrive at the other late.

I left the band program three pieces from the end because it felt less conspicuous drifting away from an outdoor concert on the Musical Arts Center lawn than to enter Auer Hall late for a concert. To be truthful, those in charge at Auer, knowing that I and some others were making the switch, were kindly delaying the start of the 8 o'clock. But that crowd, rightfully so, was getting restless. And the Festival Chamber Players did begin their concert, I'm certain, before the band got through its closing number, Karl King's "Barnum and Bailey's Favorite."

The solution seems so simple: On those double event evenings, why not schedule the second one 15 minutes later? I say this every year. Maybe one day, someone will follow through. Crossovers should be encouraged, not gotten in the way of.

At any rate, for the crowd at the band concert, the evening was perfect, cool, breezy, very comfortable. And under conductor Stephen Pratt, the ensemble played with enviable precision and considerable verve. As usual, the repertoire ranged widely. An oom-pa-pa "Königsmarsch" by Richard Strauss was followed by an ebullient expression of the American experience, "American Faces," written in 1995 by David Holsinger. A mid-19th century "Freischütz Quickstep," translated for band by the American composer Claudio Grafulla from themes Carl Maria von Weber wrote for his opera, "Der Freischütz," was followed by an instrumental arrangement of the well-known "Vilia" aria from Franz Lehár's operetta, "The Merry Widow."

The five flutists in the band came forward to show off their skills in a light and lively dance by French Baroque composer Marin Marais and, a little later, the seven clarinetists did likewise in "Clarinet Allegro," by the late, Indiana-born Frank Cofield. Both groups earned enthusiastic applause.

I also heard a carefully prepared reading of "Alte Kameraden" ("Old Comrades"), a rousing late 19th century march of some

renown by the German Carl Teike and an extended "South Pacific Symphonic Scenario," highlighting most of the songs from that Rodgers and Hammerstein musical.

Unfortunately, to shift venues, I missed Saichi Konagaya's "Star Puzzle March," a medley of George M. Cohan songs, and the previously mentioned King march.

Festival Chamber Players

It was labeled "Concert of Twos," and, indeed, save for one late break, that was the format of Wednesday night's Summer Music program, a series of pieces for two musicians.

The Kim sisters from South Korea, violinist Wonji and pianist Wonmin, dominated the program's opening period, serving up the Sonata for their two instruments by Leos Janacek and the Opus 22 Romances of Clara Schumann. The three Schumann Romances were lovely salon pieces, not of great substance but pleasant to hear as played by the talented Kims.

The Janacek was something else again, a sonata written around the time that World War I broke out, genuinely expressive of the composer's feelings about current events. The music alternates so that the violinist either saws with the instrument or sings. Wonji Kim's violin did both fervently. Wonmin's pianism blended right in to symbolize Janacek's observation that in his Sonata, "I could just about hear sound of the steel clashing in my troubled head."

From the vociferous ovation that followed a reading of Zoltan Kodaly's Duo by violinist Sarah Kapustin and cellist Joachim Eijlander, that performance was the audience favorite of the evening. The Duo, also written on the eve of World War I, claims a foundation of Hungarian folk music, but its mood is rarely celebratory. Instead, it offers a dialogue that might translate verbally into expressions of gloom and anger and sorrow and hurt, much of it intensely, even aggressively shared. The Kapustin-Eijlander performance was powerful, spine-tingling.

Violist Atar Arad broke the chain of "twos" to play an intriguing new prelude written for him by fellow performer Melia Watras. She, on viola, and violinist Michael Jinsoo Lim united to present her 2013 composition, "Liquid Voices," in which, sound-wise, the instruments appeared to take on water. Watras and Arad then teamed for two of his compositions, a melancholy "Esther" and a capricious "Toccatina A La Turk."