

'From One to Four' musicians on stage provide varied, intriguing concert

By Peter Jacobi
H-T Reviewer
7/3/2009

The designation "Festival Chamber Players," during the current IU Summer Music Festival, has meant different personnel on different occasions. On Wednesday evening, it meant violinist Mihaela Martin and violist Atar Arad, who appeared on stage at Recital Hall in various configurations with the collaborating Biava Quartet, all to realize a program intriguingly labeled "From One to Four."

The music chosen required those shifting numbers: one for Bach's Partita in D Minor for Solo Violin, BWV 1004; two for a set of viola duos by Jean-Marie LeClair; three for Krzysztof Penderecki's Trio for Strings, and four for Alberto Ginastera's Quartet Number 1.

An interesting concept it was, strengthened by the music itself and the persuasive manner in which it was performed.

The program started boldly with the Bach Partita, 25 minutes of incredible, unparalleled technical challenge for a violinist, capped by that remarkable and remarkably difficult Chaconne, with its majestic melody, one that begins in full chords and then gets magically transformed in the course of 31 variations. Mihaela Martin dared herself to play Bach's great gift to the violin and triumphed. Her performance was clean, crisp, spirited, often transcendently expressive, and, thankfully, devoid of the excess vibrato that tempts too many of today's violinists, only to spoil the music's impact.

Violist Arad was joined by the Biava Quartet's violist, Mary Persin, in three duos for viola written by the Frenchman LeClair. Dating from the early 18th century, these proved to be attractively decorated pieces that, thanks to the performers, exuded plenty of charm.

Penderecki's 1991 String Trio — undertaken by Martin, Arad, and the Biava's cellist, Jason Calloway — was a jarring change, its content sometimes biting and agitated, even percussive in its development, at other times severely bleak. The package, just twelve minutes long, would be a bear for run-of-the-mill musicians to master, but these three appeared to have no problems at all. They conquered the score's intricacies and disclosed its seemingly tormented nature.

The program ended with the Ginastera Quartet, as performed by the Biava, its violinists — Austin Hartman and Kyunsu Ko — making their first appearance of the evening. The music, described by the composer as an example of his then newly acquired style, subjective nationalism, still embodies elements of the composer's beloved Argentine folk music, but the material has been altered by contemporary dissonances, cadences, ways and means that give the music a character suggestive of Bartok and Stravinsky. The result is striking and was made the more so by the amazingly adept and flexible Biava four. They continue to impress as an artistic combine of rare merit.