

**Vancouver Chamber Music
Festival: Concert 5**
presented by Vancouver
Recital Society
Saturday, August 4, 8:15pm
Crofton House School
by Colin MacDonald

The Vancouver Recital Society has a reputation for bringing the finest international musicians to our city, to perform the repertoire of traditionally respected European composers. On the fifth program of the Chamber Music Festival it was refreshing to see that some local performers could hold their own with the imported talent, and that a new Canadian composition could be featured alongside the standard fare.

Toronto composer Omar Daniel was commissioned by the CBC to create a work for this festival, and he took the opportunity to showcase the individual talent of Vancouver percussion virtuoso Salvador Ferreras. *El Corazón y el Tigre (The Heart and the Tiger)* was inspired by the writings of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, and although purely instrumental music, each of the four movements was titled with a fragment of text taken from Neruda's "Captain's Verses." The percussionist played a major role in the work, but it was by no means a chamber concerto, demanding precision ensemble work from violins Scott St. John and Ruggero Alliffranchini, violist Misha Amory, cellist Nina Maria Lee, and local harpist Heidi Krutzen.

Daniel's music took the lead from Neruda's elemental love poetry, which calls up emotion ranging from gentle sensuality to predatory desire. Bold sound images were created in clear, dramatic gestures punctuating carefully coloured textures, and dreamlike fragments

of melody passed seamlessly from foreground to background. Ferreras distinguished himself in a tambourine solo that proved, paradoxically, how melodically he could play using only rhythm.

Alban Berg displayed the romantic side of atonality in *Four Pieces, Op. 5*. Played by Vancouver clarinetist François Houle, and pianist Adam Neiman, these miniature works showed the sense of melody that made Berg the most popular of the early atonal composers. The fragmentary images verged on the edge of silence, music of complex introspection with occasional outbursts of energy. Houle may have been a bit too restrained in his performance, showing how quietly he could play, and the piano tended to dominate the performance.

A beautiful *Piano Quintet in E-flat minor, Op. 26* by Erno Dohnányi combined densely contrapuntal writing with Hungarian melodies to create a dramatic and passionate work that was marked by a sense of the mystical. Played by Anton Nel on piano, Alliffranchini and St. John on violins, Nokuthula Ngwenyama on viola, and Alisa Weilerstein on cello, the work's sudden modulations, strong declamation, and moments of playfulness combined in an experience that was soul wrenching, but ultimately satisfying.

A rare sense of humour came to light in Johannes Brahms' *Quintet in G major, Op. 111*. The Borromeo String Quartet, with added violist Hsin-Yun Huang, played with a sparkling energy, capturing the lively feel of Brahms' classical, and almost Mozartean structures. The sense of joy was a refreshing change from some of the German master's moodier works, and seemed to come from a happier time in his life.

Finding a balance between the old and the new is a struggle for classical music presenters, but the Vancouver Recital Society succeeds in keeping the tradition alive and growing.