

Festival provides another historic moment

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The Cabrillo Music Festival covers vast territory each season, scuttling about between locations and lugging arsenals of instruments to accommodate gargantuan endeavors most other organizations would never attempt.

Yet, one of the festival's most attractive lures is its annual chamber recital featuring Dennis Russell Davies on piano and Romuald Tecco on violin. With these modest means at their disposal, the two can sometimes generate more magic than the entire orchestra.

Their enlightened treatment of music spoils one; each year they seem to add

Review new increments of subtlety to the repertoire, never by exaggeration but rather through elucidation.

Davies and Tecco explore music thoroughly and communicate their findings with exactitude, fusing intricacy and purpose together with unerring consistency.

Saturday night at the Cabrillo Theater, Davies and Tecco performed Prokofiev's "Violin Sonata No. 2," two of Schoenfield's "Three Country Fiddle Pieces" and were joined by cellist Lee Duckles for Ravel's "Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello."

Prokofiev never had it so good; the duo humored his sweet/sour countenances with deft restraint, allowing the composer's romantic side to roam, but well within the confines of his meticulous classicism. The entire sonata was sprinkled with sardonic nonchalance: harmonic progressions lead-

ing through odd neighborhoods but somehow always finding their way home again.

"Who Let the Cat Out Last Night?" and "Pining for Betsy" from Schoenfield's "Three Country Fiddle Pieces" were well-crafted, high-flying workouts. The first was a whacky dervish, sparring bluegrass and blues in numerous contrapuntal environments. The piece giggled with absurd juxtapositions, sometimes with the players concurrently burning through different blues progressions. Schoenfield managed such arrangements well while keeping a leash on the frenzied elements.

As the slow movement arrived, (like something the cat dragged in), my leftover smile was gradually wiped away by the encroaching sobriety of the material. It was an almost tempo-less floater of desolate blues figures that ended the first half of the program rather bleakly.

Ravel's "Trio" was judiciously reserved for last. The composer's grace absolved all previous dissonances and left us in a realm of quixotic revelry. The modere was flowed freely, unencumbered by extraneous complications. The gentle passecaille journeyed more inward, shaded with simple harmonic turns and color changes through a series of 10 variations. The finale was ornately garnered by fluttering tremolos, trills and harmonics in constant bloom.

Davies, Tecco and Duckles shared prominence with true democracy, poking mellifluously in and out of relief and converging at key points with unified aim. It was chamber music at its best, intimate, expressive and precise.

This year the festival really hit it off with accordion junkies. Not only was the accordion feted in two orchestra concerts, but on Saturday afternoon French accordionist Myriam Bonnin unlocked a full chest of solo transcriptions and indigenous scores for the instrument; she squeezed the life out of them.

The appearance of accordions is not a common sight in concert halls, partly because their invention barely predates Lawrence Welk. Yet, it's maluable capacity can indeed hold real substance when in a virtuoso's hands. With a six-octave range and abundant timbral stops, it can fill out a vast, expressive breadth.

Bonnin played a handful of Baroque transcriptions by Couperin, Bach and Scarlatti, extolling their tonal brilliance and linear designs with partial clarity. The instrument's own biases veiled the lower voices in favor of the treble register, weakening the contrapuntal fiber in instances where the bass tessitura was vital.

Bonnin's dexterity and command of the instrument was consummate. She oper-

ated the matrix of buttons and keys nimbly, all the while pumping the bellows in a slow, rocking fashion.

Another, perhaps, inherent quirk of the accordion popped up in the maintenance of a solid rhythmic alignment between hands. In Bach's "Prelude and Fugue in A Minor," downbeats and accents averted regimentation as if divided by an echo factor (which was not the case).

As the music got newer, it got worse. The transcriptions may not have been native to the accordion, but they acclimated well and their content was solid. On the other hand, the works on the second portion of the program (largely penned by contemporary Soviet composers), may have been intended for accordion, but their basic musical ingredients left much to be desired. Of the newer works, Ceminov's "Fantaisie a la Memoire de Sukchin" held the most original musical thoughts and Solotarev's "Finale of Sonata No. 3" made spectacular use of techniques, but did so without much continuity.

It was another historic moment at the Cabrillo Music Festival, one that will hopefully lead to some exciting new literature for the neglected windjammer. It was a rare treat to say the least, although such an undiluted concentration of solo accordion was a bit much for one sitting.