

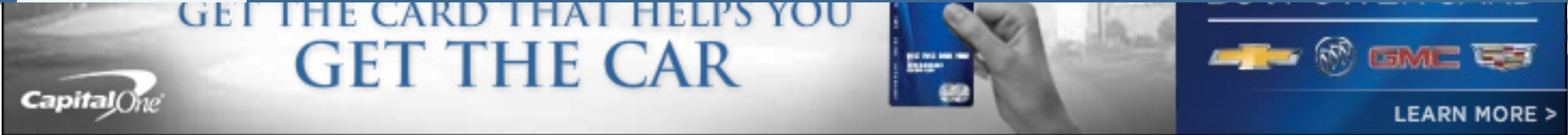
Friday, August 15, 2014

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Cypress String Quartet

By **KEITH POWERS**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER
August 15, 2014



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COTUIT – The Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival hosted a dance party Tuesday night. Since everyone’s skills at the skacna, Siciliano, furiant, minuet and Czech polka were a bit rusty, they could be forgiven for remaining in their seats.

The Cypress String Quartet provided the dance tunes at the Cotuit Center for the Arts, but only in the most stylized fashion. It came from the music of Haydn and Dvorak, and the quartet tossed in a beautiful Divertimento from Erwin Schulhoff as well. Of course the dance forms were entirely folded into the service of the compositions, hidden away in the rhythms, while sophisticated gestures and harmonies circulated above.

Dance forms inserted into string quartets are the norm, as first violinist Cecily Ward pointed out while introducing one of Haydn’s late quartets, the Op. 76, No. 5. It was Haydn who made it so, basically inventing the modern notion of the string quartet. He decided how many movements there should be, what their character should be; created the elaborate possibilities of sonata-allegro form; and then went on to write almost sixty examples, many of which still get performed.

It’s as if Abner Doubleday not only invented baseball, but played like Babe Ruth as well.

The Op. 76, No. 5 is awash in experiments that the master performed on his own creation. Movements are transformed — the first is a mild theme-and-variations, its country dance origins (the Siciliano) unrecognizable, but buttressing the rhythm.

It’s the slow movement (here, a Largo) that captured Haydn’s imagination, and soothes audiences. Longer than all the other movements combined, this centerpiece of introspection has two themes, both introduced by Ward. The first feels like an aria; the second, a jerky, dotted notion with repeated chords supporting. After they are introduced, they are skillfully recombined into multiple shadowy resemblances of the original ideas.

The finale, which jokingly presents an ending cadence right at the beginning (“If someone falls asleep during the quartet,” Ward said, “they might wake up thinking they’ve missed the entire finale”), charges along with great humor, constantly hinting at the ending, until it finally does conclude, sent off into a spirited coda by second violinist Tom Stone.

Cypress played flawlessly throughout the evening, confident in tone, deeply empathetic to the music and to each other’s individual parts. The group seemed to reach out to each other even more directly while playing Dvorak’s Op. 51 quartet, a work with endless melodies drawn from the composer’s Czech heritage.

The fulcrum of this quartet is its Dumka, the second movement, a form Dvorak did not invent but explored so thoroughly that it is forever associated with his name. The premise of the Dumka is simple: quiet, melancholic sections of music are interrupted without explanation or transition by outbursts of joy.

In this Dumka, Ward sketches out a dark line, echoed by violist Ethan Filner, with cellist Jennifer Kloetzel strumming chords that sound like a harp. The interjected jovial section (which imitates the folk dance called the furiant) comes alive, but never dispels the introspective mood. In this Dumka, melancholy wins.

Cypress also inserted Schulhoff’s thoroughly charming Divertimento into the program. An early work by one of the many composers lost to the savagery of World War II, its five movements had an easy familiarity, prefiguring in many ways the urbane European style of composers like Nino Rota.

As they did throughout the evening, the quartet played with intelligence and emotion. They performed an encore of equal imagination, one of two sketches Charles Tomlinson Griffes wrote on Native American folk music. This one, of Hopi origin, deserves more than just encore attention.

In Concert

What: Cypress String Quartet
 Presented by: Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival
 When: Tuesday night (festival runs through Aug. 22)
 Where: Cotuit Center for the Arts
 Festival tickets/information: www.capecodchambermusic.org or 508-247-9400

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