

SouthCoast Chamber Music Series keeps the heat on Sunday in Dartmouth

By Keith Powers, Contributing Writer

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Balance. Too loud, too soft — both are out of place, even when the music is great.

Balance lies at the root of all good performances in classical music — or more appropriately, at all the problems in classical music performances. The piano is too loud. The cello too deep. The violin too high.

In the case of the South Coast Chamber Music Series performance Saturday afternoon at St. Gabriel's Church in Marion, everything was just right — except the guitar.

Guest guitarist Aaron Larget-Caplan joined the core SCCMS quartet — pianist and director Janice Weber, violinist Piotr Buczek, violist Don Krishnaswami and cellist Timothy Roberts — for a truly terrific program with varied repertory, mostly favoring Spanish influences. The problem was simple: you couldn't hear the guitar.

It's a basic conundrum for classical guitar, in classical music. Delicately plucked with the fingers, with no pedals to amplify or sustain the sound, the guitar just can't compete sonically. Not with lusty bowed instruments like the cello or violin, and certainly not with that sound-producing behemoth, the piano.

It's nobody's fault — just the nature of the beast. The fact that Larget-Caplan has an inherently delicate touch as well — the sign of a true guitar artist in the solo world — didn't help matters while making music with a quartet.

But the music itself was fascinating, complex and thoroughly entertaining — when you could hear it. The five instrumentalists mixed and matched: an opening set of nuevo tango trios by Piazzolla, for the bowed string players; a charming fantasy for piano and guitar by Castelnuovo-Tedesco; a Paganini string trio with guitar, well-developed; songs by de Falla for guitar and cello; and finally, a more traditional piano quartet by Turina.

The works that featured guitar — the Tedesco fantasy, the Paganini trio and the de Falla songs — all did their best to fortify — or work around — the instrument's volume. In the two movement Tedesco fantasy, Weber played with a short stick — the piano lid reduced to barely a crack.

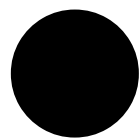
In the expansive Paganini trio — the great violinist was also a prolific guitarist as well — the guitar was limited to accompaniment, except for a solo in the Rondo finale, and a brilliant Minuet. In that movement, the cellist and violist also placed their instruments on their laps and plucked, guitar-style. The de Falla folk songs — rearranged from a vocal version — largely placed the singer's part in the hands of the cello.

The repertory was deeply intriguing. The Paganini trio not only featured the unusual Minuet, but a gorgeous slow movement, with the viola (Krishnaswami played beautifully) and cello trading and repeating lines. The Tedesco duet — it couldn't really be called a sonata — featured some devilish piano figures, turned nicely by Weber, to go along with the necessarily restrained fingering needed to accommodate her partner. The de Falla songs were darkly engaging, each different.

Turina's quartet, not heard nearly enough, was dramatic, heavily gestural, with rhythmic intensity. Its melodies were not deeply tuneful or memorable, but spirited playing — Buczek especially, and Weber — brought the work alive. Recurring phrases, echoing throughout the four movements, created an instant air of familiarity.

This program repeats this afternoon at St. Peter's Church (351 Elm St.) in South Dartmouth, beginning at 4 p.m.

SCCMS resumes its programs March 10 and 11 with Chiaroscuro, works by Haydn, Bartok and Dvorak, featuring guest EmmaLee Holmes-Hicks, violin. For tickets and information visit www.nbsymphony.org or call 508-999-6276.



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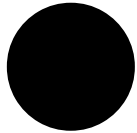
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