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Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival remembers Samuel Sanders

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CONTRIBUTING WRITER
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WELLFLEET -- Thirty-five years is a long time. But not so long that anyone has forgotten the achievements of pianist Samuel Sanders.

The late founder of the Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival was remembered Friday evening at the First Congregational Church in Wellfleet in just the way he might have appreciated: a concert by his friends, with music they had performed with him, in a festival that thrives three-and-a-half decades after he made it possible.

If all the musicians Sanders ever collaborated with appeared at this concert, music in the rest of world might be silent for one night. An intelligent and sensitive partner, Sanders sat in with the likes of Yo-Yo Ma, Izthak Perlman, Beverly Sills, Jessye Norman, Mstislav Rostropovich, Joshua Bell and many others before his death in 1999.

For this program, violinists Stephanie Chase and Nicholas Kitchen, cellists Laurence Lesser and Yeesun Kim, pianist Jon Klibonoff and flutist Carol Wincenc all took turns remembering the early days of the music festival, and then performing pieces that remembered Sanders as well.

The first half of the program was a pastiche of compositions, some fiery, others lyric. After intermission, Kitchen, Kim and Klibonoff performed a major piano trio, Mendelssohn's C minor from "Op. 66."

If a concert can begin in any more thunderous fashion, let's hear it. Kitchen and Klibonoff collaborated on Fritz Kreisler's "Praeludium and Allegro." "The Praeludium," deceptively difficult, sets stately, mid-tempo extended phrases, all bowed boldly, against the "Allegro," a hair-raising gambit usually reserved for concert closers. Kitchen played like a possessed man, his tone secure and accurate no matter how many notes his fingers were landing on.

Lesser, the esteemed president of New England Conservatory (now retired), remembered meeting Sanders at the 1966 Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow (where Lesser won top cello prize, and Sanders his own special citation collaborating with cellist Stephen Kates). He then performed George Crumb's solo sonata, a challenging and fulfilling work. The centerpiece was a thorny theme-and-variations in the middle movement, each variant (one all pizzicato, one all scales, another muted) a new adventure.

Carol Wincenc performed in the earliest days of the festival, on her way to the distinguished career she now enjoys. She played four works, alternately lyric and boisterous. For a reading of Debussy's familiar "Syrinx," a staple of any great flutist's repertory, she shut off all the lights in the church, "to leave all the sensory distractions behind," she said. It was strikingly beautiful.

Chase then took the stage and the mike, and she too remembered Sanders from the early days, when the festival was called Cape and Islands, and performed on Nantucket as well. Musically, she then turned the remembrance to a conflagration, performing a sensationally hot version of Ravel virtuosic show-stopper, "Tzigane."

Mercifully, a sense of chamber music normalcy was established after intermission. The fire and ice gave way to Mendelssohn's complex masterpiece for piano trio. With music that not only prefigures Brahms, but that Brahms then borrowed from unabashedly, this trio brings out all the best energy and interaction possible in this combination of instruments.

Klibonoff played smartly, much like Sanders might have done, especially in his solo opening to the second movement. Kitchen had the high lyric lines, and painted with the delicacy Mendelssohn intended. It was Kim, anchoring the music and stepping out for bold expression, who held the performance together. There are some performances you wish would never end.

In Concert

What: 35th anniversary celebration concert of the Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival

Where: First Congregational Church, Wellfleet

When: Friday evening. Festival runs through Aug. 22.

Tickets and information on the festival: capecodchambermusic.org or 508-247-9400.



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