

Angela Dubeau and La Pietà

Angele Dubeau and La Pietà Anything but Pitiful

Pietà means mercy or pity. It could also refer to a sculpture by Michelangelo or to an institution for orphaned and abandoned children in Venice. It is this last usage that inspired the naming of the La Pietà chamber ensemble (because many of Antonio Vivaldi's greatest compositions were written for his all-girl orchestra of the Pietà).

La Pietà chamber orchestra, which consists of nine ladies, dazzled at the Kelowna Community Theatre Friday evening. If anything, they even surpassed the finesse demonstrated in 1999, when they were last here.

Angèle Dubeau, founder and concertmaster of La Pietà, is not only a virtuoso violinist, but also, judging from the intonation and precision of the ensemble, a results-oriented leader. She gets a large expansive sound from her Stradavarius, which, however, melts into the most delicate nuances, as the situation demands. All of Pietà's members are top-notch musicians, but the pearl that stood out for me was pianist Louise-Andrée Baril. Not only does she have a superior keyboard technique, but she is also Pietà's resident arranger, customizing colourful, well crafted instrumentations for the group.

The program opened with an arrangement of an arrangement of Tomaso Antonio Vitali's Parte for Violin, which somebody renamed "Chaconne," after the fact. This was followed by Ms. Baril playing Mozart's first piano piece, in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth.

Here's to the audience, which managed not to applaud in the middle of Joaquin Rodrigo's Fantasia para un gentilhombre. But the Kelowna Community Concert membership--I included--were not so lucky with the next piece, Homage to Piazzolla. It is a potpourri of tango nuevo by Astor Piazzolla with several final-sounding cadences.

After the intermission, the La Pietà returned with Joe Hisaishi's g-minor quartet. No arranger was listed in the program, but some alteration had been made, because the first violins were not always playing in unison, and the contrabass was not always doubling the cello an octave lower.

Hongroiseries, a pastiche of passages from five of Johannes Brahms' Hungarian Dances and the Franz Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody No. 1, drew thunderous applause from the delighted audience. Dubeau solicited input in case anyone could think of a better name for the piece. How about "Hungarian Goulash," Angèle? Two fiddles and a viola left the stage for Enesco's First Romanian Rhapsody, but the remaining six musicians played up a storm. This was greeted by a storm of applause from the capacity crowd.

The final number was listed simply as Carmen. I was pretty sure Pietà was not going to play the whole score but couldn't guess what excerpts it would choose from this melody-filled masterpiece. What did emerge was a superb potpourri of the opera's major tunes. Kudos to Baril, the arranger.

Two well deserved encores and a standing ovation marked this as another triumph for the Kelowna Community Concert Association.