

Monday, March 28, 2011

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James Durbin makes 'Idol' tour; meets a childhood hero

A memorable evening at Santa Cruz Baroque Festival

Posted: 03/17/2011 01:30:37 AM PDT

A master lutenist/guitarist, young musicians, and an array of ancient instruments came together at UC Santa Cruz's Music Recital Hall Saturday evening. The occasion was the Santa Cruz Baroque Festival's second concert in this season's "Endangered Musics."

Plucked-instrument virtuoso John Schneiderman performed brilliantly on baroque lute, and 19th-century Russian and Spanish guitars. Artistic director Linda Burman-Hall awarded prizes to this year's winners of the Festival's Youth Chamber Music Competition. The first-prize ensemble dazzled listeners with their winning performance. An annotated lobby display of ancient instruments added educational depth to "Rare Strings," the program's title. Schneiderman displayed his mastery of three seldom-heard instruments, presented in chronological order. Beginning with the baroque lute, he played 18th-century sonatas by Silvius Leopold Weiss and Adam Falckenhagen, explaining that the tradition of writing sonatas and suites of several movements in the same key grew out of the fact that the lute must be specially tuned for each different key. Schneiderman displayed the music's dynamic contrasts, though this instrument's mild voice is better suited to a small drawing room or Baroque-era royal chamber than a 300-plus-seat concert hall.

The Russian guitar, this one with a double neck to accommodate a set of open bass strings as well as the fretted ones, proved more resonant. Here Schneiderman presented Russian-flavored

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The Early Music Minstrels from Mountain View opened last weekend's Baroque... (Contributed photo)

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classical works with dramatic major/minor contrasts. He described this guitar as a Russian national instrument in the way that the banjo is an American national instrument, and demonstrated the two instrument's similar tuning schemes with a country banjo riff.

On the 19th-century Spanish guitar, a slightly smaller version of today's classical guitar, Schneiderman beautifully played an array of pieces by Napoleon Coste and Joann Kasper Mertz. This music covered broad emotional territory, with moods that hinted at the ensuing Romantic Era.

The evening's program opened with a performance by the Early Music Minstrels, from the Community School of Music and Arts in Mountain View. This

ensemble: Ruri Wen-Matsui, recorders; Kyle Liu, bassoon; Clark Wu harpsichord; and Lauren Biglow, voice and cello; won first place in the Festival's Youth Chamber Music Competition. Their own arrangement of a 13th-century song, "Cantiga de Santa Maria No.100" showed understanding of medieval musical practice as well as excellent interpretive and technical skills. Vivaldi's "Sonata in A-minor for Recorder, Bassoon, and Continuo" displayed precision and sprightly energy.

Two Santa Cruz ensembles tied for second place: a trio, which had performed two Italian arias, and a quintet, which had played Borodin's "Quintet in C-Minor." Honorable mention went to a seven-member ensemble from Monte Vista Christian School for an Albinoni concerto. Burman-Hall expressed her wish to feature these groups at a later Baroque Festival concert.

I was fortunate enough to assist Burman-Hall in judging the Competition -- its eighth year. There were eight ensembles -- every one of impressive quality. A joy to hear fine music making by serious young musicians!

Phyllis Rosenblum writes on classical music for the Sentinel. Contact her through her website at phyllisrosenblum.com.