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Music Theory

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For most of us, 2pm on a Monday afternoon means sitting in our offices or classrooms and impatiently waiting for the day to come to an end. For the group of people gather at Good Shephard Presbyterian Church on West 66th Street, 2p.m on a Monday afternoon means the start of a performance by the Jupiter Symphony. The performance is part of a chamber music program. The program is a series of chamber music performances used to honor Jens Nygaard. Nygaard was an American orchestra conductor who founded the Jupiter Symphony in 1979. Nygaard passed away in 2001. Following his death, Mei Ying, his companion, organized the Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players. The Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players have about 20 performances each season. These performances are hosted in the comfortable and quiet space of Good Shepard Presbyterian Church. The church is very quaint and, contrary to an extravagant place like Avery Fisher Hall, cozy. I have never felt younger than when I scanned the room looking at my fellow audience members. Everyone around me was very dressed up. The ladies wore outfits similar to something they’d wear for Sunday mass, and most of the older men were in collared dress shirts. From their outfits alone, I could tell that the older group of people looked forward to these concerts and thoroughly enjoyed them. I had the opportunity to speak with Diane Symonds, a regular attendee of these performances. Ms. Symonds said that these performances are perfect for members of the older generation. She also pointed out to me that this series in particular was organized by Michael Volpert, who she knows is very passionate about the performances the Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players puts on. Nonetheless, I was skeptical and had my doubts. I paid 10 dollars to sit in the middle of a small church, at 2p.m. on a Monday, with a room full of people I didn’t quite fit in with. No matter how ebulliently Ms. Symonds spoke about her previous experiences, this definitely wasn’t the concert atmosphere I was used to. After the two of us finished chatting, the show was ready to begin and I was ready to see what the Jupiter Symphony had in store for me.

The audience settled down and Michael Volpert walked onto the stage area. He thanked everyone for coming, gave some background on the Jupiter Symphony, and spoke about the wonderful conductor, musician and person Jens Nygaard was. By the looks on the faces of the people surrounding me, and by what Ms. Symonds had told me about him, I had the feeling that many people were fond of Mr. Volpert’s work with organizing this musical series. Volpert gave us insight on the performance we’d be hearing today. This particular concert in the series was called, “In and Out of Russia” and would include performances of Juon’s Divertimento in C Major *Op. 34* (1908), Arensky’s Piano Trio No. 2 in F Minor *Op. 73* (1905), and Tchaikovsky’s *Souvenir de Florence* Op. 70 (1887-1892). (Note: I was unable to stay for the performance of Tchaikovsky’s piece; therefore, it is not part of this review). He then introduced the first group of players. The first piece the Symphony played was Paul Juon’s Divertimento in C Major *Op. 34.*This was played by two violinists and a clarinet player. The lead violinist, who was difficult to understand, introduced the piece by giving some background information on it. He pointed out how this piece was one that could be enjoyed by people from all different places; it broke geographical boundaries. After he concluded his introduction, the violinist and his two fellow performers took a step back and began playing the piece. There was no conductor guiding them through this complex piece. Regardless, they played beautifully and with so much passion. The composition itself has a very whimsical feeling to it. It is in a major key; therefore, the composition has more of a happier feeling to it. The three musicians stood together at the front of the church and translated the meaning of the music through their expression. The countless hours they spent rehearsing this piece was noticeable through how synchronized they were with one another; the violinists and clarinet player made eye contact with one another constantly throughout the piece. When the buildup for the ending came, the piece got faster and faster. As the speed increased, the musicians further built up the intensity and anticipation through their animated playing. When the piece ended, I looked around me and could see that my fellow audience members were very impressed, and I was as well.

After an applause and brief intermission, the next set of musicians walked out. The next piece was Arensky’s Piano Trio No. 2 in F minor *Op. 73* and would be played by a piano, violin, and cello. The pianist gave background information on the piece, then sat down, and the three musicians began to play. As with the musicians from the previous piece, this trio was very animated. This composition was performed in a minor, which made it seem darker than the previous piece. Something that stuck out at me in this piece was the composers use of tempo rubato; the composition frequently sped up and slowed down at different points. The musicians gestures when playing their respective instruments added an overwhelming sense of excitement to the piece. The pianist was especially passionate when playing the piece. Her arm movements were exaggerated during the faster and more intense parts of the composition. I really think the musicians’ expressive gestures were a big reason why the overall performance was so pleasantly thrilling. When the piece ended, the audience burst out in applause, again. The atmosphere in the church was not what I had expected it to be. When I first arrived, I had sat down in my seat and was expecting an average performance, but by the time this second piece was over, I was thrilled with the outcome of the concert. The outstanding performance compensated for the simple concert hall by their amazing performances. The musicians were very experienced and, from what I could tell, they played flawlessly. I was surprised to be so impressed with such a magnificent performance in this small, quiet church. I cannot wait to attend another concert in the Jupiter Symphony series.