



ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER



ENTERTAINMENT

Smetana Trio shines while going deeper into Czech music

Oct. 19, 2014 | Updated Oct. 20, 2014 11:23 a.m.

BY TIMOTHY MANGAN / CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

EMAIL

COMMENTS

PRINT

SEND PDF

The Smetana Trio, billed as the foremost of today's Czech chamber ensembles, opened the Philharmonic Society's chamber music series Saturday at Irvine Barclay Theatre with a clever program. It was an all-Czech agenda, but there wasn't a note of Dvorák on it. The message was clear enough: There's more to Czech music than you-know-who.

The group was founded in 1934, one of the original members being the current cellist's father. It records regularly (for Supraphon) and travels widely. Its performances Saturday had a nice lived-in quality, which is to say naturalness and ease and the sense that no expression was forced, but, on the contrary, merely arrived at in the course of things.

The two string players, violinist Jirí Vodicka and cellist Jan Páleníček, are a pleasure to hear. Their basic tone has a lightness and slenderness to it that helped give their phrasings a trim and direct quality. They both can bolster the intensity of a line with a quick but compact vibrato. Páleníček also used his bow tellingly, moving it with extra speed now and then, slicing into a phrase.



The Smetana Trio.

COURTESY OF KIRSHBAUM DEMLER & ASSOCIATES

At the piano, Jitka Cechová was warm and generous and virtuosic. She partnered the strings without fuss, not making a big deal of it like many pianists in chamber groups do. The group just seems to breath together. Cechová kept the lid of the piano a quarter open (one presumes so that she wouldn't overpower the strings), but, in this hall at least, it made her articulation a trifle muffled in comparison to the strings. A small thing.

They opened with Josef Suk's Piano Trio, Op. 2, completed in 1891 when the composer was just 17. It is a lovely work, charming and folksy and, despite its C-minor key, for the most part cheery. It is nicely stitched together, too. It only goes on as long as it has to.

Martín's Piano Trio No. 2, which had its premiere in 1950, is a compact work as well, lasting around 17 minutes. The work is fresh and energetic, even restless. The piece, on first acquaintance, seems stuffed with material – rich melodies and rhythmic obsessions – and the compact forms keep it coming at the listener rapidly. Martín also takes subtle advantage of genre's scoring possibilities, creating mezzotints and whirring textures.

★ MOST POPULAR

VIDEO: Disneyland turns 60 with a little extra dazzle; it's adding a parade, punching up

Updated: Three suspects arrested in Verizon store armed robbery in Yorba Linda

Raid on 'Big Daddy' hilltop party could be costly for county

1st District supervisor race becomes nail-biter, with only a few hundred votes separating

Updated: Westminster woman dies of injuries in late-night Irvine crash; driver arrested

Smetana Trio

Where: Irvine Barclay Theatre

When: Oct. 18

Next: Quatuor Mosaïques performs Haydn, Schubert and Beethoven on Oct. 30

How much: Tickets are \$35-\$45

Call: 949-553-2422

Online: www.philharmonicsociety.org

The West Coast premiere of the “Multicultural Suite” by the young Czech composer Roman Haas (born in 1980) proved witty and lively. A series of dreamy introductions lead successively to an off-kilter waltz, a dramatic bolero and a rip-roaring czardas. Winding up the evening was Smetana’s G-minor Trio, which is, like his string quartet, “From My Life,” an autobiographical work, this one concerning the tragedy of losing his 4-year-old daughter to scarlet fever.

Its sadness is full blown, chromatic and roiling; its nostalgia is melancholy and tender. The composer works through his memories and eventually places the child not out of them, but in an honored place within them, to be cherished.

Here the group’s obvious familiarity with the score – the cellist’s copy was so tattered it might have been a first edition – paid dividends. The musicians knew where they were going and exactly how to get there, without wasted motion, in razor sharp turns and quick sprints.

Contact the writer: 714-796-6811 or tmangan@ocregister.com

Original review you can follow on: <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/trio-639020-czech-work.html>

More about Smetana Trio on: <http://www.triartmanagement.cz/Ensembles/SMETANA-TRIO.html>