David Chan returns under the auspices of IVCI to help open its Laureate Series

A celebration of the violin makes sense in this harvest season as a way for the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis to reap the bounty of violin training and performance hereabouts.

To supplement the return appearance of David Chan, 1994 bronze medalist in the quadrennial competition, IVCI had the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music Virtuosi and Chamber Orchestra on hand Sunday afternoon at the Indiana Landmarks Center's Grand Hall.

Full disclosure: I am the parent of a Virtuosi alumnus who has since taught at the School of Music's String Academy, the nurturing ground of these adept precollege musicians.

Illustrative of their expert training, among other qualities: a habit of listening to each other, solid rapport virtually assuring unanimity of attach and release, dynamics and tempo. With good attention to changes in texture and color, a student sextet performed IU faculty member Atar Arad's arrangement of Prokofiev's Toccata in D minor, a solo piano work of characteristically barbed sonorities and propulsive accents.

"Seven Violin Duets," commissioned for the Virtuosi from IU composer Don Freund, found five of the violinists usually grouped in compatible twos, with all five weighing in at both ends of the set. The composer signals the straightforward mood of each duet with such titles as "Sudden Passion," "Thrilled to Death" and "Craggy Crossing." The ensemble made the most of the "sotto voce" tenderness of "Sweet Song," and one of the duos showed particular flair in "Astor Knots," a punning salute to tango maestro Astor Piazzolla. Another captured the rugged country-flavored fervor of "Burleska" with subtle humor.

A surprising insert in the opening piece — longtime Virtuosi favorite "Preludium and Allegro" by Fritz Kreisler — let the two student cellists show off in a medley of tunes ranging from "Eleanor Rigby" to the "Habanera" from "Carmen" before the violinists re-entered the spotlight with the piece's exciting "Allegro" conclusion. Vigorous accounts of two Brahms Hungarian Dances by the whole Virtuosi group displayed its unanimity amid multiple shifts of tempo.

Chan's place in the program sun came in Beethoven's "Spring" Sonata (No. 5 in F major), assisted by pianist Chih-Yi Chen. Together, they presented a neat, well-turned, classically minded performance. It threatened to become too sobersided over the long haul. In the second movement, an episode in the minor brought forth an extra measure of feeling, but it took the short, captivating Scherzo to set the duo on a more expressive course in the Rondo finale, which was crowned by some welcome power and even grandeur toward the end.

With the visitors' Chamber Orchestra in accompaniment, Chan was featured in two contrasting works after intermission: Bach's Concerto No. 2 in E major and Wieniawski's Variations on an Original Theme, op 15. The highly ornamented latter work drew forth a continual display of commitment and technical elan from the soloist. The Bach concerto, which Chan also led from the soloist's position, seemed a little
headlong in the opening movement, the ensemble pressing forward too much, making the total effect shimmery. The slow movement allowed everyone to regain poise and clarity, which came in handy in the fleet, invigorating finale.

For an encore, Chan and the Virtuosi offered a sweet rendition of Paganini’s “Cantabile,” which acknowledged the guest artist’s regular job as co-concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra.

Posted by Jay Harvey at 7:01 PM No comments:
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Laureate concert features stars of the future

by Tom Aldridge

What I experienced Sunday afternoon gave me renewed hope that classical music has a bright, continuing future. The IU Chamber Orchestra, with 20 string players between the ages of 10 and 18, together with IVCI laureate David Chan, now concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, gave us a landmark concert. And how apropos, as the venue was the Grand Hall in the recently refurbished Indiana Landmarks Center. These youngsters comprise the best of gifted pre-college students who study at the String Academy in IU’s Jacobs School of Music.

Along with David Chan, the IVCI bronze medalist from 1994 occasionally leading them, seven of the players--three violinists, two violists and two cellists--form the IU Virtuosi. Chih-Yi Chen once again appeared as our chamber pianist mainstay. With a program of seven works spanning the centuries and styles from Bach to Don Freund (b. 1947), the ever-changing player combination forced a considerable "down" time between some selections as one person had to rearrange all the music stands.

The IU Virtuosi started the program with Fritz Kreisler's Praeludium and Allegro in the style of Paganini, beginning with darkness and drama, but ending with famous Romantic quotes from far more composers than just Paganini--Schumann's "Joyous Farmer," Bizet's "Habañera," Paganini's 24th Caprice, etc. Freund's Seven Violin Duets followed--a modernist compendium of briefly expressed moods--the first and last one featuring five violins rather than the two "advertised."

All the IU virtuosi returned for Brahms' very familiar Hungarian Dances Nos. 1 and 6. Then Chan appeared with Chen for Beethoven's again-well-known "Spring" Sonata (No. 5 in F, Op. 24). Another change of pace gave us
Prokofiev's Toccata in D Minor, arranged for string sextet--two violins, two violas and two cellos. This was written in his early "enfant terrible" style.

Chan then returned with the full chamber orchestra in the program's highlight, Bach's Violin Concerto No. 2 in E, BWV 1042. The group remained for Wieniawski's light-veined Variations on an Original Theme in A, with a bit of a show-off ending--and concluded with an encore, Paganini's "Cantabile," written in a catchy triple meter.

Throughout the concert, our youngsters (at least two of them pre-pubescent) played with the skill of a professional group: crisply, together and with virtually perfect intonation, handling the widely varying repertoire with aplomb. Chan easily displayed his IVCI laureate status with vibrant-but-controlled energy and smooth singing lines in the slow sections. As a pianist, Chen's high-order-musicianship showed through all the strings she had to compete with. This clearly was where all the chamber regulars and their "friends" in town wanted to be -- at that time. Oct. 20; Indiana Landmarks Center