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The Chronicle-Herald

ArtsLife, Thursday, June 2, 2011, p. F8

Uchida, Crow soar in Scotia fest opening concert

Stephen Pedersen

Scotia Festival of Music opened Tuesday night in the Dunn with a violin solo, followed by two sets of violin duets, a percussion sextet and a piano quartet. The duets were by Bartok and Berio, the sextet by Steve Reich, and the quartet by Brahms.

The performance began with a breathtakingly intimate and personal interpretation by violinist Robert Uchida (concertmaster of Symphony Nova Scotia) of Bach's Sonata in G Minor for Solo Violin, also known as the First Partita.

The concert was all about time and duration, and how what a composer can say is determined by the time he needs to say it. And particularly in the solo and violin duos, viewed from the performer's perspective, about how time is as plastic and variable as any image skewed and transmogrified by computer graphics.

As an experienced chamber music audience, which included veteran music lovers, master professional players and advanced young career igniters honing their fire in the crucible of live performance, we all knew approximately what to expect in the way of length from the new pieces and were familiar with the others.

What kept us all listening was what performers give us in the way of insights. Performance is as much about teaching the music to us as it is about diverting us with it.

Time in the performance of the solo violin work was not just about fast and slow, but also about how, for expression and projection, you have to take more time on certain important notes, and hurry others to make up the difference so that the beat doesn't slow down.

The structure of the violin affected Bach's requirements for the harmony to be played on two or three or even four strings at the same time. The curve of the bridge makes that strictly impossible, so the player has to draw them out sequentially, yet the sound has to suggest they are simultaneous.

Musicians, being what they are, treat each impossibility as an expressive opportunity. We hear the chords as two chords, but accept them as one. This is pure magic. And Uchida, who completely dominates your attention when he plays, is a master magician.

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