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Below is a review by Festival DC.com Henri Polgar, music critic of PaPa, a UN affiliated non-profit organization.

(Photo: L. to R.: Chateau Gardecki, Maria Nedelcovic, Portia Davidson, Natalia Karazyan, Narime Malkhasyan (spouse of Ambassador to U.S. from Armenia), Rhoda Septilici)



Pianist Natalia Kazaryan Celebrates Women Composers in WIPAC's Spring Prelude Concert

WIPAC has continued its promise to bring beautiful piano performances to its audiences, despite the constraints of the pandemic. While devoted fans await the announcement of the next WIPAC International Piano Arts Competition, the organization

has sponsored a series of recitals, the latest of which was a concert performed by pianist Natalia Kazaryan, which took place at the St. Luke Catholic Church in McLean on March 19, 2021.

Ms. Kazaryan performed with the assurance and poise of a true artist. As a devote of women composers, she featured works by the well-known composers Clara Schumann and Lili Boulanger. Hopefully through her efforts they will continue to appear on programs by virtue of their greatness. She continues to expand her lecture-recitals showcasing works of female composers and recently performed with the National Symphony Orchestra to celebrate the centennial of the 19th Amendment.

A native of the Republic of Georgia of Armenian descent, she is currently a Professor of Music at Howard University. WIPAC hosted a special guest for Ms. Kazaryan's concert, the spouse of the Armenian Ambassador to the US, Narine Malkhasyan.

Ms. Kazaryan performed the Clara Schumann's "Romance Opus 20," with a sense of clarity, and projected fluency and ease through her mastery of the piano. She displayed a beautiful tonality and dexterity in the execution of the piece.

Ms. Kazaryan's next selection was the Opus 118 by Johannes Brahms, one of the most beloved collection of works by Brahms. It is comprised of six pieces: Intermezzo in A minor; Intermezzo in A Major; Ballade in G minor; Intermezzo in F minor; Romance in F Major, and Intermezzo in E flat minor. They were written in 1893, and dedicated to Clara Schumann, who died in 1896. Brahms died in 1897.

Frequently noted by music historians, it was believed that Brahms and Clara Schumann were in love, given the tenor of the letters they exchanged between 1853 and 1896. They were introduced

to each other by Brahms' mentor and Clara Schumann's husband Robert Schumann. Shortly after, Robert Schumann attempted to take his life by jumping into the Rhine, and having survived, he was remanded to an asylum at his own request. Brahms was selected to visit with Robert Schumann, as Clara was prevented to see Robert, who would respond too emotionally to her presence. Schumann died in 1856, approximately two years later.

Although it is presumptuous for us to judge what such great artists expressed in their personal lives, the Opus 118 does evoke beautiful emotions of love and passion. We can only speculate through our imagination what inspired Brahms to write such music. Ms. Kazaryan's beautiful insights into these pieces are part of her gift as a musician with great sensitivities.

The "Trois Morceaux" by Lili Boulanger entitled Dans Un Vieux Jardin; Dans Un Clair Jardin and Cortège, was another gem in Natalia Kazaryan's program. Lili Boulanger, the first woman to receive the Prix de Rome in 1913 with the Cantata Faust and Helene, was a prodigy and composer of orchestral and piano works. She tragically died at the age of 24 in 1918.

Natalia Kazaryan explained, "I'll never forget how I felt when I first played the opening measures of Lili Boulanger's three pieces for piano, the beautiful harmonies immediately take a surprising turn, revealing the composer's boundless imagination, poetic beauty and vivid character." Playing with fervor and energy, Ms. Kazaryan reflected a genuine understanding of Lili Boulanger's music.

While her life was cut short at a very young age, Lili Boulanger received acclaim and recognition in her own lifetime. Her genius and precociousness manifested itself at a very young age, as she was brought up in an extraordinary musical family environment, surrounded by her musician parents, her sister, the preeminent Nadia Boulanger, her family friend and first teacher, Gabriel Faure. Nadia Boulanger describes Lili Boulanger's source of inspiration, "...her whole talent was rooted in her knowledge of grief when our father died. She was six years old and at six she knew what death was; that is the grief of surviving someone you love..." The spirit which envelops Lili Boulanger's music was fully captured by Natalia Kazaryan's interpretative awareness.

In completing her performance, Ms. Kazaryan's choice of Maurice Ravel's Jeux d'Eau was consistent with the impressionist "musical époque" connection with Lili Boulanger, who was recognized as a major impressionist composer, along with Debussy and Ravel. Jeux d'Eau, one of Ravel's first major works, was written in 1902 and dedicated to his teacher Gabriel Faure. Ravel did not want to be referred to as a composer of the impressionist period, but more as influenced by the symbolist literary movement of the time. Ravel also regarded himself as a "classicist." As one of the leading poets of the day Stéphane Mallarmé (whom Ravel wrote songs set to his words) wrote "symbolism depicts not the thing but the effect it produces."

Ms. Kazaryan's interpretation of the Jeux d'Eau glimmered with shimmering sounds depicting water flowing from the fountain, as she retained the classical structure of the work.

It is auspicious that WIPAC has found a venue for recitals at St. Luke Church. A beautiful structure and a wonderful site for concerts, it is also the home of the unique Falcone piano. As reported by Lucian Rhodes in Inc. Magazine, the piano was created by Santi Falcone in the 1980s. The Falcone has been referred to as the "Stradivarius of the keyboards." In 1983 Santi Falcone founded the Falcone Piano Co. in a small woodworking shop. Rudolph Serkin tried the new instrument and referred to Falcone as an artist. The pianist Leonard Shure, who used a Falcone piano to perform the Brahms Concerto with the Boston Symphony, thought it was the best piano he ever played. But

the piano brand could not compete with the Baldwin and Steinway Companies in providing pianos for concerts throughout the country. Eventually, after building a few hundred of these pianos by hand, it eventually passed hands to different investors, and finally was owned by the Nanjing Mutrie Piano Co. in China. The original Falcone pianos are regarded as amongst the greatest instruments ever created and the Saint Luke Church Falcone piano, acquired in 1993, most likely was a vintage of its superior original handmade quality. Pianist Natalia Kazaryan's musicality certainly brought out its best sonorities.

(PHOTO: Natalia Kazaryan with Lola Reinch)



WIPAC's Founder, Chateau Gardecki, acknowledged those who made the "Prelude to Spring" concert a reality, including the event's Co-Chairs, Maria Zelmira and Ines Nedelcovic. WIPAC's President, Portia Davidson and Maria Zelmira Nedelcovic

presented awards to Lola Reinsch and Dr. Wayne and Mrs. Linda Sharp for their generous contributions. The concert was also made possible with donations from Ms. Frances Berkman and Suzanne Finney.

WIPAC CONTACT:

Chateau Gardecki

WIPAC Founder & Board Chair

www.wipac.org 703 728-7766