

Kinga Augustyn's (Mostly) Solo Violin Concert, March 11 2020



The concert was under the auspices of the Susquehanna Symphony and the Havre de Grace Arts Collective in the town of Havre de Grace, a picturesque location in northern Maryland on the Susquehanna River at its outlet into Chesapeake Bay. Despite the looming threat of the Coronavirus pandemic, it was well-attended.

The program was as follows:

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), Partita No. 2 in D minor for solo violin,
5. Chaconne

Niccolo Paganini (1782-1840), Caprices Op. 1
No. 13, No. 24

Eugene Ysaÿe (1858-1931), Sonata No. 3 for Solo Violin, Op. 27 "Ballade" (1926)

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909-1969), Sonata No. 2 for Solo Violin (1958)

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741), Concerto for Four Violins in B minor, RV 580
1. Allegro

Isang Yun (1917-1995), Königliches Thema (1976)

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992), Tango Etudes for Solo Violin (1987)
No. 1 "Décidé", No. 4 "Lento-Meditativo", No. 6 "Avec anxiété"

The Chaconne is one of the crowning achievements in Western music of any era, and Kinga has a special affinity for Bach's Baroque. She is currently finalizing a video recording Bach's three solo partitas and three solo sonatas, recorded in the great acoustic confines of churches in New York City.

Paganini's Caprices are arguably the ultimate test of violin virtuosity, and Kinga has recorded the entire set of 24 not once but twice. The 24th, probably the best known and the subject of variations by many composers from Liszt and Brahms to 20th C. Rachmaninoff, Lutosławski and Łabuński, is a joy for both the ear and the eye. In one section, the bow plays ricochet while the left hand simultaneously plays pizzicato on the fingerboard. A great tour de force!

The two 20th C. Sonatas by Ysaÿe and Bacewicz are not in the atonal style of the serialists, but do introduce piquant dissonances that are a stark contrast to Baroque and romantic styles. I especially liked Kinga's rendition of the Bacewicz – wonderfully done with great expressiveness.

The Vivaldi Concerto for 4 Violins was performed by Kinga and a quartet of teen-age musicians (two of them doubling the part of Violin 4), with the string orchestra represented by a viola, cello and double bass. The interplay of the four soloists was most interesting, and the young musicians did a splendid job. Kinga had conducted a master class for them earlier that day, so they were well-prepared.

I found the Yun piece interesting on first hearing, but did not relate to it as well as I did to Ysaÿe and Bacewicz. I will have to hear it again, and Kinga is including it in a forthcoming recording.

Astor Piazzolla, whose music I first heard several years ago, is one of my favorite modern composers for violin. The Tango Etudes are miniature gems, and Kinga did them full justice. A great conclusion to an excellent program, excellently performed.

Unfortunately, the second part of Kinga's appearance in Maryland, with the Susquehanna Symphony playing the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, was cancelled because of pandemic fears. I was especially sorry to hear that – it is my favorite concerto by far, and I had just heard it by Akiko Suwanai with the Washington National Symphony at Kennedy Center a couple of weeks earlier, and wanted to compare the soloist's executions.