

Sara Davis Buechner

No 'Bronx Cheer' for Sara

In December's Kelowna Community Concert Association offering, Sara Davis Buechner, the visiting artist, related that she wanted to intimidate her first UBC piano class. Confronting her awestruck students, she told them not to expect an easy time: "I'm from the Bronx," she said.

The university piano class was duly impressed, but not more than Monday's audience at the Kelowna Community theatre, which was collectively enthralled by Buechner's recital.

One might rave about her technique, touch, and phrasing. One could speak of her overall understanding, the dynamic range, or the remarkable scarcity of wrong notes. But I think my wife hit the nail on the head when she excitedly told me that, during the playing of the Mozart F major sonata, she saw Mozart himself in the pool hall, mentally composing this work while awaiting his next turn at billiards.

My wife then said she actually saw a portly Johannes Brahms with a flowing beard playing the two rhapsodies, opus 79, as Buechner was performing them.

Most great pianists--just think of Glenn Gould or Anton Kuerti--develop their own distinctive style, which colours everything they play. Sara D. Buechner, however, somehow seems to get inside the mind of the composer and recreate the composer's intentions.

It was uncanny. During the All'Italia, for example, I could close my eyes and well imagine I was listening to Ferruccio Busoni himself playing his elegy in modo napolitano. Other reviewers, too, must have an experience akin to mine when they write about a Buechner interpretation that would make the composer proud.

The second half of the program was much lighter the first, but not much easier to play. Buechner led off with a delightful set of salon pieces by Rudolf Friml. The final number in the set, the Bohemian Dance opus 29, was quite challenging and must have been written as an encore piece for one of Friml's pianist friends.

During the concert, Ms. Buechner entertained the audience as much with her witty commentary as with her fantastic playing. For instance, in the following set of George Gershwin songs, Buechner dedicated one of them--Let's Call the Whole Thing Off--to her ex-husband. These songs were arranged by Buechner for piano as foxtrots. Again, the arrangements were so Gershwin-esque that I'd have sworn that Gershwin himself had done them.

To close the program, Buechner played the arrangement for solo piano by Gershwin of his Rhapsody in Blue. It was pure Gershwin, as we had never experienced before.

Of course there had to be an encore. Even with a 4:00 AM flight to catch the next day, and not even liking encores, Buechner favoured the enthusiastic Kelowna crowd with a touching rendition of Gershwin's The Man I Love.