



After the tempest, music returns to Staten Island

By **Michael J. Fressola**

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- The two-ensemble concert "Made in Staten Island" was planned pre-Sandy. Still, WaFoo, the jazz band, and Musical Chairs, the chamber group, were quick to re-cast the afternoon concert in St. Mary's Episcopal Church, West Brighton, last week as a storm benefit.

Similarly, a few days later, the Chamber Music Collective of the College of Staten Island dedicated its "Happy Birthday Claude Debussy" concert to Islanders buffeted by the storm.

At St. Mary's, Musical Chairs opened the show with Telemann (Sonata 2 in c minor) and Beethoven (Duo in C Major for violin and cello), works that emphasize, among other things, the tricky cooperative requirements of chamber music. The musicians were flutist and founder of the group, Tamara Keshecki, violinist Lucy Corwin and cellist Vincent Moncada, a newcomer to the eight-year-old ensemble.

WaFoo began its set, as is often the group's custom, with a short rainstick prelude, provided by Yuuki Koike the group's flutist and saxophonist.

Each of the three short works had a different emphasis. Amazingly fluid pianist Takeshi Asai had wonderful things to do in "Shun lai" ("Spring Thunder"), a piece he wrote. It's a restrained take on an electrical storm.

Bassist Kazuo Nakamura's "Matsuri" ("Festival") is uptempo and cerebral simultaneously. Ms. Koike's terrific sax lines were the star of "Crying Sumo Man" by Masashi Sonoda.

The third section brought the two ensembles together to play music by Asai and Nakamura. A jazz combo and a



WaFoo and Musical Chairs joined for a two-ensemble concert re-cast as a benefit for Hurricane Sandy victims.

chamber group probably should not sound as good together as they did. The advantage is time. They've been sharing programs for several seasons now and it shows.

And the music finds places in which jazz, chamber practice and Japanese tradition are either comfortable together or mutually inspiring.

Ms. Keshecki spoke for everyone in the room when she expressed surprise about one piece: "My Japanese-born friend Kazuo has written a bluegrass number."

Proceeds from ticket and CD sales were directed to local relief efforts. The performance was funded in part by a grant from the Council on the Arts & Humanities for Staten Island. It will be reprised Dec. 1 at 3 p.m. in the Greenbelt Nature Center, Egbertville.

SUBCSI COLLECTIVE

Surprises came hard and fast at the Chamber Music Collective concert, a music faculty gig, at CSI.

Like what? Like, there was hardly a grey hair in the audience or an empty seat. Like, performing and teaching aren't mutually exclusive. Like, the under-utilized Recital Hall in the Center for the Arts has terrific acoustics.

And also, how dare we take Claude Debussy (1862-1918).

Clearly, students (mostly the Honors College) were nudged by their profs to attend the performance, but they were also rapt. It's good to see.

The small hall's acoustic has recommended itself in the past, but rarely so beautifully as they did at this concert, which featured musicians who happen to teach.

As for Debussy, his "Clair de lune" is such a senior-recital standard, it's easy to forget how lovely it is, and how difficult it is to do well. Pianist Sylvia Kahan reminded all that the piece is a triumph, but she also made it look easy.

Then, she and clarinetist David Keberle pulled off the same trick — no-sweat mastery — with the modern and jazzy Premiere Rhapsodie for Clarinet and Piano. Hard to believe that the piece is 112 years old this year.

A small-group arrangement of "Afternoon of the Faun" was evocative enough, but didn't quite levitate the way it should. The two other Debussys were sonatas, Violin and Piano (1917), and Flute, Viola and Harp (1915), both done well by pianist Yoojin Oh, violinist Olivier Fluchaire and flutist David Wechsler.

Wisely, the program moved temporarily out of early modern Paris, for a suite of exquisite songs by Manuel de Falla. Soprano Elena Heimur sang them with extravagant warmth and intelligence, accompanied by guitarist Ed Brown, playing repertoire he owns.

So, the birthday was Debussy's, but the gifts were showered on the audience.

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