

Style

Monday, January 10, 2005

Phil Mathieu, Giorgia Cavallaro

Guitarists Phil Mathieu and Giorgia Cavallaro boiled down the *raison d'être* of their selections Saturday at Strathmore Hall by reciting the Walt Whitman lines “I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear.” Like Whitman, whose poem touched on the broadly democratic vistas of America, the duo presented music celebrating its more commonplace beauties. It was a program that reminisced on homespun Hausmusik—most of it originally meant for a guitar duo—which invited

Americans to sing along and dance as the 19th century edged into the 20th.

Strathmore’s massive stone fireplace behind the guitarists conjured visions of family and friends gathered around as they played works by William Foden (1860-1947) that Mathieu discovered recently. Six “Songs and Dances”—waltzes, a polka, a fandango—resonated a pleasant archaic tunefulness that other American composers such as Louis Moreau Gottschalk earlier and Edward MacDowell, Foden’s exact contemporary, forged into solid art music. Foden’s “Neo-Baroque Suite” aspired to re-create Bach’s era, but it lacks that fundamental dissonance impelling the older scores.

Another curious but slightly more substantial ode to Bach followed intermission: Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco’s Prelude and Fugue in A from his “Well-Tempered Guitars,” Op. 199. The first piece was a grotesque takeoff on Gershwin’s “I Got Plenty o’ Nothin’” from “Porgy and Bess.” Cavallaro was at her best in her arrangement of “Shenandoah,” while both musicians rendered Mathieu’s setting of “’Tis the Last Rose of Summer” with glowing timbres.



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— Cecelia Porter