

Brilliant Return of Clarinetist Mariam Adam

by David Beech

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Monterey native Mariam Adam made a welcome return to the area on Friday evening, March 7, 2014 to play at All Saints' Church, Carmel in a fund-raiser for Youth Music Monterey, of which she is an alumna. Now based in New York, Mariam has made an international reputation with the wind quintet Imani Winds in the past 15 years, and she also has formidable ability in the clarinet and piano repertoire, as she demonstrated in this recital together with equally accomplished Berlin-born pianist, Evelyn Ulex.

Eschewing any easy warm-up, the program began with the ambitious Toccata by Jeff Scott (who is also the Imani horn player). This proved to be interesting and exciting for the players and the audience, with only a slight concern that the balance at times favored the piano too much, with its lid fully raised.

However, as soon as the Brahms Sonata, Op.120 no.1, began, all fears on this score vanished. The radiant tone of the clarinet carried clearly, and the early *legato* up to a high E-flat floated out more beautifully than I had ever heard it. All four movements were played with appropriate poise and passion and sensitive interaction between the parts. The good projection of the clarinet allowed the piano to be played with true Brahmsian weight, making for a partnership that measured up to the stature of this late masterpiece.

There followed another striking modern work, the *Armenian Lament and Dance* by Hungarian clarinetist and composer Bela Kovacs. The lugubrious lament led via a dazzling clarinet cadenza to a vivid dance in which clarinet and piano were well together, with a stratospheric ending.

Astor Piazzolla's *Oblivion* was gorgeously seductive with the clarinet accompanied by stylish string playing from Farkhad Khudiyev (violin) and Aleksey Klyushnik (double bass), conductor and string coach respectively of Youth Music Monterey.

Finally, we were treated to the virtuosity of three of Paquito D'Rivera's *Cape Cod Files: Benny at 100, Lecuoneras, and Chiquita Blues*. Here again, both clarinet and piano excelled. Starting with a tribute to Benny Goodman, these pieces allowed Mariam Adam to show that she was just as comfortable playing fast and high as Benny used to be.

Besides the very high standards of the players, a noteworthy feature of the evening was the structure of

the program, which successfully surrounded a full-length classical work with shorter modern pieces that were good enough to live in this august company.

Now that Youth Music Monterey has begun to supplement its excellent youth orchestra and chamber music activities with these concerts by adult performers, the most pressing need is to find a way to enlarge the audience. This may just be a matter of better publicity to bring in parents and the general public, but where are the young musicians who could be inspired by hearing such playing? Perhaps a weekend time would make it easier for many of them to attend.

End

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