Harbisons render recital rapturously

Rose Mary and John Harbison in recital including premieres of new John Harbison work, Kresge Auditorium, September 21.

While Boston flocked last week to pay $75 for a mediocre recital by Luciano Pavarotti, the MIT community attended a priceless concert for free. The Harbisons — Rose Mary and John — gave a new definition to pleasure Saturday night with performances which combined wit and charm with a deep sense of musicality.

The Largo and Allegro assai from Saint-Saens Introduction et Rondeau Capricieux, op.38 can be given a syrupy-sweet gloss that prevents penetration to the core of the work. But the Harbisons provided a refreshingly clean and revealing performance. Rose Mary Harbison played the violin part lightly, but always melodiously, while clarity and understated rhythmic drive marked John Harbison’s piano playing. The work grew remarkably as cross-currents vigorously flowing in the most torturous passages were dispelled with ease and grace.

John Harbison is known for imbuing his music with lyricism, and in his new compositions — Four Songs of Solitude — he has not let us down. Saturday night we heard three of the songs — the link from the fourth is hardly dry, said Harbison in an introductory. The lyrical qualities of the first song overlaid the work’s reflective, inward-looking textures: although Harbison’s work is intimate, not massive in structure like the Bach — connections with the earlier Bach work became quite apparent in the pitting and combining of intellect and romance in Rose Mary Harbison’s eloquent playing. There were elements of Schubertian color to the second song; the third — reflective once more — ended leaving the listener deep in thought.

Kreisler without schmaltz is quite a revelation — and Harbison husband and wife pared three Kreisler pieces down to basics, bringing them off with both charm and substance. The unpretentious virtuosity of Rose Mary Harbison was met matched by the elegant light piano style of John. The two Harbisons a league produced rapture.

Erratum

The recording number for the Thomas Alva Edison recital of Mozart arias reviewed in The Tech on September 6 was incorrect. The recital is available on Angel record #DS-38043 and tape #4DS-38043.

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