Stoltzman captivating: Harbison compelling

Richard Stoltzman, clarinet recital, Jordan Hall, November 17, Boston Chamber Music Society, Sanders Theatre, November 17, event in The Tech Performing Arts Series: David Deveau, piano recital, Jordan Hall, November 16.

Richard Stoltzman could convince an audience of the merits of any piece of music: His playing bubbles with so much life and he is so clearly enjoying himself that there's no choice but to sit back and be entertained.

Stoltzman is complete master of his instrument, but he is no practitioner of cheap showmanship. Sunday afternoon in Jordan Hall, he played a varied program, some of which would have been in danger of being drawn into his musical world. The Allegro amabile was indeed given a smiling performance, the warmth of playing, celebrity of coloration providing new insights at every turn. Irma Vallecillo provided a well-balanced piano complement to Stoltzman, drawing him from Summer into autumnal hues.

Deveau's Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo were gripping, especially the last of them, done on an Elkhorn clarinet. Stoltzman drew the jazz out of the piece, while maintaining its Stravinsky identity.

The remainder of the program—Bernstein Gershwin arrangements—was pure entertainment. The final encore, Serenity, by Charles Ives was just that: serene.

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John Harbison's technique in his Piano Quintet is so push launchers into his music at the top of the funnel, trap and then guided them carefully through, before expelling them at the end, memorized and stated.

The Quintet, highlight of Sunday's concert by the Boston Chamber Music Society in Sanders Theatre, drew the best of the evening's playing from the ensemble. The rhythm raged frenetically for the exciting Overture: Allegro, to be displaced by genteel pizzicato humor in the Capriccio. Close ensemble playing paid dividends in the Intermezzo.

Conservation intensified yet more for the Venetian Burletta, entwined on the surface, perhaps, but given a magnetic, inward drawing treatment to evoke Harbison's special world.

Christopher O'Reiley started the tension building in the closing Elegie, pizzicato then followed through the electric-fresh atmosphere as stray raindrops in the lull of a storm. Fantastic impressions of moses grew in intensity as the piece increasingly drew into itself, the last prelude, somber note leaving the listener in a trance, the mind cleansed.

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David Deveau gave a mineable Chopin recital on Saturday in Jordan Hall. His whole approach—superficial and uninhibited—let a overly mechanical air to the evening; Deveau could play the right notes, but they lacked substance. The Polonaise Fantasie, Op. 61, which began the program was amorphous, the lengthy Polonaise in B minor, Op. 38, which ended the proceedings was as lengthy as it was flat. It was an unmemorable evening, a big disappointment following Deveau's rapturous recital Mozart playing with Stoltzman. I wonder what happened.

Jonathan Richardson