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The East Coast Chamber Orchestra Provide a Lush, Sweeping Coda to This Year's Naumburg Bandshell Concerts

by delarue

Yesterday evening was this year's final installment of the newly resumed and increasingly popular [Naumburg Bandshell concerts](#). Needless to say, it's been heartwarming to see attendance continuing to grow like it has in the last couple of weeks, although considering how this city was deprived of live music for the better part of the past two years, that turnout is hardly a surprise.

Self-directed string ensemble the [East Coast Chamber Orchestra](#) opened their own return to the bandshell with Adolphus Hailstork's Sonata di Chiesa, a series of variations on allusively gospel-tinged themes. The orchestra quickly shifted from a stern march to a triumphant hymnal swirl with violin and cello front and center in majestic, restrained interplay which grew more carefree. A lively, buoyant dance interlude gave way to what might be termed a balmy southern soul pastorate which resonated in the early evening mugginess hanging over the park.

Slowly and methodically, the ensemble brought the theme down to the cellos out of a Dvorakian wariness, then rose with more than a hint of stately plainchant that grew more lush and windswept. The orchestra took it out with a return to a triumphant waltz.

Next on the bill was a triptych bookending a pair of rare Peruvian renaissance songs around a Josquin lost-love canon, arranged for strings by Maureen Nelson. Matching sumptuous sweep with an icepick precision from the violins, these fifteenth-century pieces reflected European grace more than any discernible indigenous influences.

The orchestra wound up the evening with a vigorous, richly dynamic, Mahlerian arrangement of Schubert's String Quartet No. 14, "Death and the Maiden." A stiletto grace underpinned the initial heroic theme: the first of the series of blustering riffs from the cellos, before the false ending, packed a visceral wallop. The effect was much the same again after the group returned from a comfortably lulling counterpoint.

It didn't take long for the orchestra to bring that anthemic edge back after the initial ballad theme in the andante second movement, where the heroine is reassured that she shouldn't fear the reaper.

Awash in wistful lushness, the third movement rose to a High Romantic angst that a mere four strings couldn't have hoped to match. Impressively, the coda was as balletesque as it was symphonic. They encored with an unhurried arrangement of the Bach chorale Schmucke Dich, o Liebe Seele, raising it to a plushness considerably beyond the spare version which is a staple of the organ repertoire.

One issue that needs to be resolved for next year, which wasn't a significant problem earlier this summer, was when a Parks Department truck with a shrieking backup alarm interrupted the end of the Peruvian baroque suite...and then returned during one of the concert's quietest moments. Stupidity? Sadism? There are two ways to deal with that issue. It couldn't hurt for the organizers (and the New York Philharmonic, whose Central Park shows have been just as rudely interrupted) to get the word out to those behind the wheel. A simpler solution would involve a pair of wire cutters.

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