

Remembrance season ends on a superb note

By R.M. CAMPBELL
P-I MUSIC CRITIC

It would seem that Music of Remembrance, a chamber music organization dedicated to performing music from or about the Holocaust, is newly born, but in fact it is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

MUSIC REVIEW

MUSIC OF REMEMBRANCE

WHEN: Monday night

WHERE: Nordstrom Recital Hall

On Monday the organization closed its season at Nordstrom Recital Hall with an all-embracing and moving concert.

There were two world premieres Monday, both commissioned by Music of Remembrance: David Stock's arrangement of Chava Alberstein's "Mayn Shvester Khaye" and Paul Schoenfield's "Ghetto Songs."

"Ghetto Songs" a song cycle scored for soprano and baritone along with violin, cello, double bass, clarinet and piano, was set to poems of Mordecai Gebirtig, who was shot to death in 1942 in Krakow, Poland, for refusing to be deported to a concentration camp.

The poems are stark, angry and bittersweet. So is the music, which makes deft use of the two vocal soloists and the unusual instrumentation behind them. At times the music is almost violent and at other times poignant. It is nearly always compelling. The performance was likewise, headed by Morgan Smith and Angela Niederloh. I don't know why the performance used a narrator to recite the texts, when they were printed in the program. Just turn the houselights up so people can read them. The constant breaks in the music-making diminished its spirit and power.

"Mayn Shvester Khaye" was set to Binem Heller's poem dedicated to his sister, who died at Treblinka. The music gains its expressive potency not so much with fierceness but with grave lyricism. Mezzo-soprano Julie Mirel was the soloist.

There were six other works on the program, which ran long. Among the most moving was a set of Viktor Ullmann's choral arrangements of Yiddish and Hebrew songs, sung by the incomparable Northwest Boychoir, led by artistic director Joseph Crnko. How

this group manages what it does is astonishing. These six songs are all over the emotional and rhythmic map, but the boychoir never faltered.

Also making a strong impression was Egon Ledec's "Serenade," "Kyticka" and "Andante." Ledec was born in Bohemia in 1889 and died in 1944 at Auschwitz. Before the German occupation in 1939 he was associate concertmaster of the Czech Philharmonic. The three pieces are salon pieces that are elegant and charming. They were played as such. Erwin Schulhoff's Concertino was given a lively performance, and the soulfulness of Ernest Bloch's "Nigun" was readily captured by young violinist Mara Rossano, the 2008 David Tonkonogui Memorial Award winner.

P-I music critic R.M. Campbell can be reached at 206-448-8396 or rmcampbell@seattlepi.com.