
Music of Remembrance: Remembering creators of beauty in times of terror

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Concert Review

Music of Remembrance presented its final concert of the season on Monday night at the Nordstrom Recital Hall at Benaroya Hall, and after 10 years, the group continues to remind us of one of the most severe lessons in human history, preserving vital works of music while sparking new ones.

The composers in the first half of the program represented the thriving artistic life in European Jewish communities before and during World War II, beginning with a pair of prewar works: Ernest Bloch's "Nigun" and an Erwin Schulhoff Concertino. It was appropriate to the spirit of constant renewal that the Bloch piece was played by young violinist Marié Rossano, whose performance was as passionate as it was technically impressive.

One of the real joys of the evening was the performance by the Northwest Boychoir of Yiddish and Hebrew folk songs arranged by Viktor Ullmann, which filled the room with the hopeful voices of youth, love and playfulness. The music has so much life, one would hardly guess it was arranged in the

camp at Terezin, surrounded by Nazi guards.

Beauty created under terror was a definite theme of the evening, which continued with the U.S. premiere of three short pieces by Czech composer Egon Ledec, written in 1940. These whimsical, optimistic pieces are salon music, really, and belie the storm that was raging around him at the time they were written.

The latter half of the concert took a change of tone, with a darker subject matter that much more openly acknowledging the evil by which it was surrounded. David Stock's new arrangement of an Israeli song by Chava Alberstein, "Mayn Shvester Chaya" (a world premiere) began where the poetry of the first half left off, with a whimsical remembrance of the poet's sister and all her charming girlish quirks. But the taste of ash soon enters the picture as he remembers her death.

It was in this sentiment that MOR debuted the concert finale, a world premiere of its commission from Paul Schoenfield, "Ghetto Songs," settings of poetry by Mordecai

Gebirtig. These six Yiddish poems paint the hope, despair, and other complex emotions from inside the Krakow ghetto. Schoenfield's music immediately extends that poetry in the first work, "Shifrele's Portrait," with a vocalese that seems to sing wordlessly from the painting of a young girl.

In the concluding work of the set, "Moments of Confidence," the poet recognizes all the danger around him, but his confidence comes from defiance of these things. His prophetic pronouncement on his own murderers provided a dramatic exclamation point to a compelling evening of human life in the face of death.

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