**2017 VMEA Collegiate Recital:**

Percussive Saxophone and Dank Mozart Memes

As always, one of the highlight of the 2017 VMEA professional development conference was the collegiate recital during the evening of Friday, November 17. The recital gives exceptional students from institutions throughout the state to gather and perform for an incredibly welcoming and eager audience. This year’s recital featured ten performances, one of which was comprised of phenomenal BC seniors Caroline Caplen and Adam Kelly. Other schools represented in the recital included George Mason, Old Dominion, Radford, Lynchburg, Shenandoah, and Christopher Newport. Something I found particularly enjoyable and refreshing about the program was the range of uniqueness and contrast in **style** and **instrumentation** of the various performances. There was strings, winds, brass, piano, and accordion of all things. For the purpose of this paper I won’t touch on every performance since there were so many. I will, however, examine specific details as well as things I thought were interesting about the pieces I found to be the most memorable.

The atmosphere of the recital kept with the VMEA conference norm of professionalism. Every year the conference brings together teachers of varying levels of experience, as well as prospective teachers, to create an environment that not only effectively emphasizes collaboration, but dignity and a professional mindset. Educators as well as collegiate NAfME members in attendance at the senior recital were dressed in their absolute finest attire. The ritzy setting venue of the Homestead’s grand ballroom further added to the experience. BC NAfME approached the recital with the same amount of enthusiasm we carried all weekend, and excitedly sat with professors and past members in the front two rows. The first performance of the evening was cellist Kevin Fields from Old Dominion playing Bach’s *Suite for Solo Cello No. 3 in C Major.* I was impressed that the first performance was unaccompanied. From experience I know that playing without accompaniment can be fairly nerve-racking, and I’d imagine setting the tone for the evening would invoke some anxiety for the performer. Much to the approval of the audience, Mr. Fields gave a superbly-executed rendition of the piece, and the warm, calming **timbre** of the cello was an excellent way to initiate the recital.

After the opening solo, there was another unaccompanied performance by flautist Dawn Metzler of George Mason, followed by the next of the performances that I found most interesting. This time it was a **trio** made up of flautist Kaitlin Isaac, clarinetist Madeline Amend, and oboist Brigid Donahue of Christopher Newport. The three played *Divertimento* by Malcom Arnold. This was the longest piece that was played at the recital, and it was apparent just how much work the group dedicated towards putting on an excellent performance. The piece used various examples of an idea or theme that would appear in one part, and later in another. The **melody** frequently changed from instrument to instrument, and there were also several moments where two of the players would play a sort of duet accompanied by the third player playing a simple **harmony**. This alternating focus on each of the three players gave the piece its color, and the trio was one of the more memorable acts of the recital.

The trio was followed by mezzo-soprano Charlotte Hargest and guitarist Zach Wood from Radford. The soft and mysterious guitar harmony combined with a powerful vocal part created an outstanding performance despite its shorter length. The next piece was Christian Lauba’s *Flamenco* performed by alto saxophonist Drake Stoughton of Shenandoah. This piece caught me by surprise, as it begins with the player making sound by pressing the keys of the horn, without blowing any air through it. As a saxophone player this was a new and exciting concept to me. The style of the piece reminded me of the **toccata** style discussed in the course, with multiple entrances where the player would play fast runs of **arpeggios** that showed off the players outstanding skillset. Personally, I wished that Mr. Stoughton had played something that further showed off his incredible tone, perhaps a more **lyrical** piece. Nevertheless, the performance was extremely impressive.

Following Mr. Stoughton was our very own Caroline Caplen, accompanied by Adam Kelly. The two performed “Ach, ich fuhls” from Mozart’s Opera entitled *Die Zauberflote*. This Opera was first premiered two months after Mozart’s untimely death in 1791 (Eisen, *Mozart*). During this time, it was becoming more acceptable for composers to borrow ideas or styles from one another, and the spread of musical elements from composer to composer was becoming more apparent. In fact, Steven Jan proposes that this particular piece is an example of a growing “memeplex” during this time, or the act of a composer favoring their own survival and evolution over time (Jan, The *Evolution of a 'Memeplex' in Late Mozart*). The Webster’s definition of a meme is “an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from one person to another in a culture.” In other words, at the time of writing the opera Mozart was using musical elements in increasingly similar ways as other composers as an attempt to remain relevant. As always, Caroline put an overwhelming amount of emotion into her performance, and the piece was just what the midway point of the recital needed.

Following Caroline was Casey Welch, and accordion player from Radford. After a few eager BC NAfME members whispered their excitement to another, a Radford student turned around and requested that we not make fun of his classmate. This seemed to confuse Dr. Carrillo. The performance was near flawless, and showed off Mr. Welch’s incredible talent. The upbeat and happy **rhythm** contrasted greatly Caroline’s rendition of the Mozart excerpt. After Mr. Welch there was Renee Banks with Dr. Ramsey of Radford playing Eugene Bozza’s ***Aria*** *pour Saxophone alto*. This was a composer I was familiar with because I wrestled with one of his harder pieces for my spring semester jury last year. Next, from George Mason, was the duet of Matt Pazanowski and Tim Fary, Jr. on trumpet, accompanied by David Anderson on piano. The three played the “Sundown” from *Under Western Skies* by Kevin McKee. The composer was originally planning on Skypeing in and listening to the performance, but could not because of the birth of his child the night before. Instead, the three dedicated the performance to the infant child of the composer in a heart-warming gesture for the entire audience.

The final performance of the evening was by Hattie Bays with Jeremy Craft of Lynchburg. Ms. Bays sang “Je Veux Vivre from *Romeo and Juliet* by Charles Gounod. The performance was impressive, demonstrating Ms. Bays ability to maintain confident sound quality while moving up and down her **range** **chromatically**. All in all, the concert was a great success, and exemplified what made the conference such an exciting time. The entire BC NAfME chapter, myself included, thoroughly enjoyed each performance.

References

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