

Round Lake Auditorium, August 23, 2012

Review by Edmund Rucinski

The Audience gathered in the Round Lake Auditorium was given a rare treat, namely the opportunity to hear a genuine Antonio Stradivari violin. Not just any Stradivari, but an instrument that has captured the public consciousness since it became the inspiration of the movie, The Red Violin, in which a fanciful history of the violin's creation and line of successive owners has assumed mythic status.

Elizabeth Pitcairn, present owner of the instrument appeared with pianist, Toby Blumenthal in works which highlighted the capabilities of both instruments and performers. Ms. Pitcairn is the present President and Artistic Director of the Luzerne Music Center in Lake Luzerne, NY. Toby Blumenthal and her late husband, Bert Phillips, founded the Luzerne Music Center in 1980.

The evening's presentations deviated from the printed program, but did not disappoint in the least. The opening selection was the first movement of the Beethoven "Spring Sonata". Deceptively simple sounding (because of its "easy listening" character), the piece is difficult to perform. Ms. Pitcairn presented one of the most elegant interpretations I have ever heard, and gave the impression that its performance was absolutely effortless. Of great accomplishment were her subtle variations in presenting repeating melodic lines, brought out through extraordinary bowing technique and control.

In an evening designed to feature the many capabilities of a violin, it is no surprise that Ms. Pitcairn chose several compositions by Fritz Kreisler, who is justifiably given legendary status among 20th Century violinists. The Three Kreisler pieces selected were Schon Rosmarin, Liebeslied and the Introduction and Allegro. In the first two selections, Ms. Pitcairn demonstrated the capabilities of her instrument to produce the lightest lilting timbre. In the last, she demonstrated the instrument's power; especially in a lengthy passage in which the piano sustained a single low note. The complex dramatic development in response to a one note accompaniment showed off the instrument in an amazing manner.

Speaking of the instrument, there was a question and answer portion of the concert in which Ms. Pitcairn discussed her instrument, and the movie, The Red Violin. Ms. Pitcairn disclosed the fact that playing a Stradivarius violin requires a different way of playing from playing a generic violin. Perhaps the best way of describing the demands of playing a Stradivarius is to liken it to driving a precision custom race car at full throttle, yet remaining in total control, no matter what.

During the discussion of the film, The Red Violin, and its relation to her own own instrument, Ms. Pitcairn wowed the audience with violin solo passages written for the movie. A telling moment of silence preceded a wild round of applause.

We can take great pride in the fact that Ms. Pitcairn, her legendary instrument and her colleagues at the Luzerne Music Center are gracing our region.

Edmund Rucinski