

# Virtuoso Showcase

by [B.A. Nilsson](#) on October 17, 2013 · 0 comments

## Elizabeth Pitcairn

University at Albany Performing Arts Center, Oct. 9

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Those who expected to be awed by the legendary Red Violin learned an important lesson last week. Elizabeth Pitcairn, who owns and plays that particular Strad, gave a recital at the University at Albany Performing Arts Center, under the aegis of Renaissance Musical Arts, proving (as if it needed more proving) that it's the performer, not the fiddle, that makes the magic.



Elizabeth Pitcairn

Still, it's a great marketing hook—or should be. Albany responded with its usual high-culture yawn as its already dangerously low brow crept even closer to its nose. Which was a shame, because some worthy magic was made.

The performers kicked off with one of Fritz Kreisler's tuneful salon pieces, the "Preludium and Allegro." It's a perfect piece for the opening slot, its stately first section suggesting pomp and nobility before it sails into an increasingly finger-busting set of variations. It also served to assure us that Pitcairn had the chops to take on the challenging works to follow. If it gave pianist Barbara Podgurski not much to do, as is typically the case with such showpieces, no

matter: Her moments were about to come.

Mozart's *Sonata No. 15* (or 32, or 40, depending on which crazy numbering system you favor) in *B-flat*, has a more sweeping, symphonic feel than its brethren, and celebrates a partnership between the instrumentalists that grew throughout the preceding 14 (or 31, or 39).

This was reinforced by the evidence of the well-honed partnership between Pitcairn and Podgurski. Every nuance of the piece—every rubato, pause, dynamic change and trill—was so in sync that it seemed preternatural.

The artists took turns introducing the pieces that warranted introduction, a practice of which I'm very much in favor, especially when said intros are conversational and brief, as here. Podgurski explained that, of Beethoven's ten violin sonatas, the one they were about to perform had the most difficult piano part—a notion that never had intruded on my violin-intensive sensibility, but which gave me so much more to listen to as they triumphed through the *Sonata No. 7*, a work that manages to be both minor-key and rollicking.

Pitcairn is artistic director of the nearby Luzerne Music Center, with a mission to provide students the kind of creatively stimulating experience she enjoyed as a teen. One of her recent composers-in-residence was Richard Danielpour, so it was fitting that she performed his melancholy "River of Light," a thoughtful contrast to the preceding classicism, and an opportunity to show the sweet side of her sound. This got even sweeter with the chestnut "Meditation" from Massenet's opera *Thaïs*, once an inescapable recital staple, now too-often ignored.

On to the pyrotechnics. The Dinicu-Heifetz "Hora Staccato" is all about the bow-arm, and her staccato was dazzling both to ear and eye. An oddly truncated "Zigeunerweisen" by Sarasate omitted the sobbing gypsy section in order to get right to a manic sequence of double-stops, harmonics, left-hand pizzicato and dazzling bowing; the performers rewarded the ensuing ovation with an arrangement from John Williams's music to *Schindler's List*.