

Winston-Salem Journal

Winston-Salem, NC

Monday, October 13, 2003

SPINE-TINGLING: Flutist's performance powerful, with an edge

By Ken Keuffel

Many flutists who studied with Philip Dunigan at the N.C. School of the Arts have gone on to great things. The latest evidence of that emerged yesterday when Debra Reuter-Pivetta soloed with the Winston-Salem Symphony in Lowell Liebermann's Concerto for Flute and Orchestra.

The performance, conducted by Peter Perret, was brilliant in every way. And the concerto, which virtuoso James Galway premiered in 1992, has lots of fetching assets to recommend it. Patrons who weren't in the Stevens Center yesterday should make it their business to attend Tuesday's performance.

If they do, they will also hear a decent performance of Prokofiev's 'Classical' Symphony, a remarkable effort written during the composer's student days. They will hear a spirited, often moving account of Beethoven's Symphony No. 4.

Perret calls this somewhat overshadowed work his favorite Beethoven symphony because of a second movement in which an insistent two-note figure mimics the sound of a heartbeat and fuels material that sounds both sublime and rowdy at the same time.

Reuter-Pivetta has made Winston-Salem her base of operations, teaching in local schools and playing principal flute in the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra. She has become a world-class performer of new, contemporary or rarely heard chamber works, often teaming up with her husband, pianist Federico Pivetta, in the process.

Reuter-Pivetta's tone combines fullness and warmth with just the right amount of edge. It is a spine-tingling delight, and she's able to project it powerfully to the farthest reaches of the hall.

Her technique, which was displayed in the concerto's scores of fiendishly difficult and note-clogged runs, is dazzling and impeccable. Her phrasing, particularly in the drawn-out and highly lyrical lines of the concerto's second slow movement, gives the term 'musical' a whole new dimension.

Liebermann's concerto, one of several popular works he has written for solo flute, follows tried-and-true compositional procedures. Nothing in its very tonal language breaks new ground in terms of musical sounds, though its skillful orchestrations are flavored with such rare instrumental combinations as a piccolo-contrabassoon duet and muted trumpets flavoring passages for plucked strings.

The music is somewhat derivative. When Prokofiev and Shostakovich don't come to mind, John Williams will, especially during a climactic moment in the opening movement that might well accompany a spaceship soaring triumphantly through extraterrestrial realms.

Cynics might call the concerto accessible and, therefore, unoriginal and unchallenging. The truth: It draws on the past to say something fresh and emotionally profound to today's audiences.