

five line dancer

Tuesday, April 12, 2011

Stranger Things at Lyric Fest !

PIFA is now in full swing and this week I'll be at a concert every night! On Sunday I was invited to the Lyric Fest's presentation of "Stranger Things". They put together a program of music from Paris in the early 20th century (PIFA's theme era) including works of Debussy, Poulenc, Stravinsky, Maurice Delage, Ravel, Satie, Milhaud, Albert Roussel, Joaquin Nin-Culmell and also Kurt Weill and Cole Porter. I drove up to Philly for the Sunday afternoon concert at the First Presbyterian Church at 21st and Walnut.



Lyric Fest in rehearsal (L to R): pianist Laura Ward, baritone Randall Scarlata and mezzo-soprano Suzanne DuPlantis. Photo: Lisa Shaffer



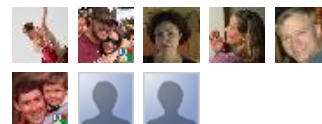
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- 2012 (2)
- ▼ 2011 (26)
 - November (2)
 - September (1)
 - July (1)
 - June (1)
 - May (3)
 - ▼ April (13)
 - [A Hallelujah Moment for Center City Opera and "Dan...](#)
 - [The Philadelphia Orchesta this weekend at PIFA](#)
 - [This Saturday? The PIFA Street Fair!](#)
 - [Trapeze lessons on Broad Street! Now at PIFA](#)
 - [Now's your chance to be part of a flash mob at PIF...](#)
 - [Shut up and Dance at World Cafe Live at the Queen](#)
 - [Want music for your child? Go to Settlement.](#)
 - [A Lyrical Opera and ? uestlove with Keren Ann](#)
 - [Petrushka unforgettable and Olga Kern at Longwood ...](#)



Composer Claude Debussy

I was first very happy to see that the program included not only translations but also engaging, easy to follow notes on each composer. I was disappointed, though, that the original text was not included next to the translation. The second thing I appreciated about the format of the concert was that the entire program, as well as each set of songs, was introduced by one of the performers to give us a sense of Paris in that era and of the legacy of many of the composers, whose students live and teach today. (Note: If Lyric Fest uses the church again I do think they should mic the speakers as I had a hard time hearing some of them, and I really wanted to know what they were saying!)



Igor Stravinsky

The most striking pieces for me were Stravinsky's "Three Japanese Lyrics" from 1913. The chamber piece was played in a piano reduction and I was excited to hear the texture along with the texts. I also enjoyed Ravel's "Aoua!" from his *Chansons Madécasses*. The sound of the cry of the native people went straight to the heart, and the text made clear the hypocrisy of the supposed "Christians".



Maurice Ravel

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► [March](#) (5)

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"Aoua! ... Beware of white men ... the white men made promises, and yet they made entrenchments, too. A menacing fort was built; Thunder was stored in muzzles of cannon; their priests pressed on us a God we did not know; They spoke finally of obedience and slavery. Sooner death! The carnage was long and terrible; But despite the thunder they spewed and which crushed whole armies, they were all wiped out. Aoua!Aoua! Beware of white men."



Darius Milhaud, who taught in the United States

Most of us know the story of Nadia Boulanger, the famous composition teacher of Paris, but not as many of us know about the other influential teachers from that era. Louis Herbine, the flautist on the concert, told the story of Marcel Moyse, who was one of the premiere flautists of the early 20th century, French born and trained, and who's teachings have been passed down as far as James Galway and his students. Incredible that a technique can have such influence.



Nadia Boulanger

The concert, though presented in its traditional format, got me in the mood of Paris in the early 20th century. It was a history lesson I didn't know I would appreciate, and I left feeling like the window had opened further onto the music of the past.



French Soprano Manon Strauss Evrard was featured in the concert -photo courtesy of Lyric Fest

The singers and instrumentalists were solid and did what was best - let the music take the fore. My especial applause goes to Suzanne DuPlantis, Randi Marrazzo and Laura Ward, the co-founding Artistic Directors of Lyric Fest, for putting together a concert that gave us all a rich context for music of the era PIFA celebrates.

This week I'll also attend on Tuesday, April 12th, *Artists, Auteurs and other Animals* (Artistes, Auteurs, et Autres Animaux: an Evening of French Chanson) at the Academy of Vocal Arts.

<http://www.pifa.org/events/980191143>

On Wednesday I'll attend Basil's Twists's *Petrushka*, a puppet version of the Ballet Russe, at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.

<http://www.pifa.org/events/980191090>

and a few hours before that I'm going to attend *Puppets: The Original Avatars* at the Penn Humanities Forum of the University of Pennsylvania

<http://www.pifa.org/events/980191167>

The talk is part of the Speaker's Series, which will happen throughout the festival. All events are free. Some sample topics: "Paris in the 1910s: Inspiring the World", "L'Après-Midi with Debussy". These are but two of the topics that will be explored by speakers at museums and on college and university campuses in collaboration with PIFA's theme, Paris from 1910 to 1920. Experts in their fields will offer scholarly insight and anecdotal material on the people, trends and works reflecting the cultural landscape in the French capital during this exciting, innovative decade.

<http://www.pifa.org/collaborators/1066130871-PIFA-Speaker-Series>

On Thursday I'll head to the Philadelphia Orchestra to hear Berg's *Lulu suite*. This is not part of PIFA, but Berg is one of my favorite composers and I have to see the concert.

And on Friday I'll attend a concert at Longwood Gardens featuring pianist Olga Kern.

<http://www.pifa.org/events/980193114>

Stay tuned for more on PIFA into the weekend and next week!

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Posted by [siren iva](#) at 6:37 AM



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