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gryphon trio in fine form

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One of the surprises in this year's Chamberfest, one of the less pleasing ones we might add, is that the Gryphon Trio is only playing one concert and by the time you read this, it will be history. Granted, at least two of its members are participating in other programs, but it's not the same thing, is it?

The program, given before as large an audience as Dominion-Chalmers can comfortably accommodate, consisted of trios by Smetana and Dvorak, as well as a new work by University of Ottawa professor James Wright.

Bredich Smetana (1824-1884) led a hard life, and his Piano Trio in G minor is the product of an especially dark period during which he lost his wife and three of their daughters. It's not surprising that the trio is full of anguished passages. More remarkable are the frequent sunny episodes, often expressed in terms of unmistakable nobility. The Gryphon Trio dug right into the turbulent score, producing as convincing an account of it as you're likely to hear. The contrasts of mood were well handled, being neither overly subtle nor too in-your-face. There is no slow movement in the piece, though there are tender episodes in all of the movements, providing an overall emotional balance. The Gryphons conveyed the balance to perfection and, as usual, their playing was impeccable.

James Wright's Letters to an Immortal Beloved for mezzo-soprano and piano trio is based upon three letters discovered after Beethoven's death in 1827. The Immortal Beloved to whom they are addressed has never been positively identified. Current thinking is divided between the Hungarian aristocrat Josephine von Brunswick and Antonie Brentano, the wife of one of Beethoven's friends. It doesn't matter for the purposes of the music, except that reflecting upon the mystery adds a layer of poignancy for the listener, and perhaps for the performers as well.

Wright's score is richly romantic but also contemporary in its sensibilities. Mezzo Julie Nesrallah's singing of the text was gorgeous as usual. Her diction could have been

a little better but translations were provided, so it didn't make a practical difference. The trio played well too, and composer Wright received a well-earned ovation.

The final offering was Dvorak's Trio in F minor, op. 65, a sunnier work than the Smetana trio, but with a similar Czech accent. The Gryphons also projected the Brahmsian influence nicely. The slow movement was especially beautiful. All in all, a wonderful ending to a wonderful concert.

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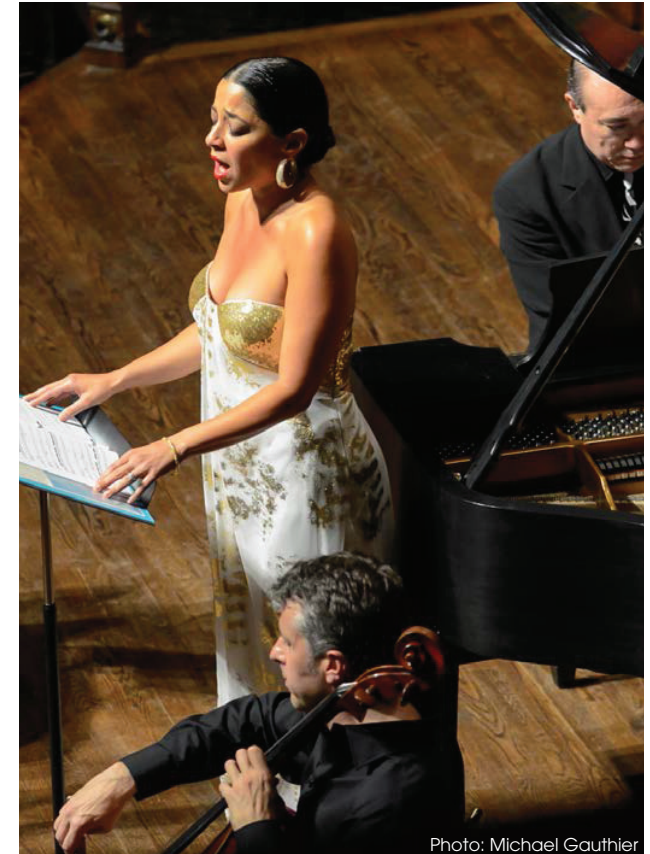


Photo: Michael Gauthier