

Voce di meche

Saturday, December 7, 2013

A BEAUTIFUL TRIBUTE



Leonarda Priore, Benjamin Perry Wenzelberg, Lynne Hayden-Findlay

Leonarda Priore, co-founder of Chelsea Opera, has honored the memory of her brother Nicholas, an attorney and a singer who died prematurely, with evenings of song and also by establishing a fund called New Possibilities. Young musical prodigy Benjamin Perry Wenzelberg is the first recipient. The two singers joined hands in both the physical realm and the spiritual realm in last night's concert.

Most affecting and most in tune with the memorial was Ms. Priore's performance of Ottorino Respighi's "*Il Tramonto*". The text by Percy Bysshe Shelley involves a man dying too young and seemed heartbreakingly relevant. Accompanying Ms. Priore was the Chelsea Opera String Quartet, comprising Marc Uys and Bruno Peña on violin, Jen Herman on viola and Troy Chang on cello. It isn't often that one hears a work for string quartet and mezzo so this was a special treat. The quartet was well-balanced throughout and also did a lovely job with Ennio Morricone's love theme from *Cinema Paradiso*.

The remainder of the evening transpired in varying styles--a lovely folk song adapted by Carl Stommen that was moving in its simplicity; the "*Pie Jesu*" from Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Requiem* in which Mr. Wenzelberg's treble blended beautifully with Ms. Priore's mezzo; Mr. Wenzelberg's exuberant solo of "Rejoice Greatly" from Handel's *Messiah*, in which he dazzled the audience with his pinpoint *fioritura*; a jazz-inflected "Bending Towards the Light" from *A Jazz Nativity* by Bob Kindred with lyrics by Anne Phillips and Henry Timm; and several selections from the world of Broadway and cabaret.

Ms. Priore has a broad background and handled the diverse styles without compromising any of the material. Jule Styne's "Winter Was Warm" suited her voice particularly well. The two singers blended beautifully in the duet "See the Light" by Alan Menken. There were some fine selections by Stephen Schwartz, David Friedman and Irving Berlin. When we saw *Wicked* on Broadway it was so heavily amplified that we couldn't understand the lyrics. Last night we were able to hear and understand and appreciate them.

The evening closed with a surprise guest; Lynn Hayden-Findlay, co-founder of Chelsea Opera, emerged from her "retirement" to sing Jerry Herman's "Bosom Buddies" from *Mame*. It was absolutely delicious! Bill Doherty did a magnificent job accompanying throughout the evening.

The Chelsea Opera has been encouraging and supporting Mr. Wenzelberg for about four years now and is currently, through the Nicholas S. Priore New Possibilities Fund, helping to launch Mr. W.'s opera *The Sleeping Beauty*. We were there for the piano/vocal reading and will be there on January 17th for the young composer's orchestral reading. And you should be there as well!