

THE NEW YORK GRAPEVINE

BARGEMUSIC: MAGIC ON THE WATERFRONT

New York, NY 03.03.10

by Paul Hansen

Although New York City has a happy myriad of concert halls, few can compete in distinctiveness with Bargemusic. Bargemusic is located at the base of the Brooklyn Bridge at the Fulton Ferry Landing. It is literally a boat that has been converted into an elegant performance space. Seating approximately 170, artists perform in front of large window panels which provide a spectacular view of Manhattan's skyline.



The President and Artistic Director of Bargemusic is world-renowned violinist Mark Peskanov, an artist who enjoys a stellar career performing with most of the major orchestras of the world. Mr. Peskanov has a warm, friendly and avuncular personality and it is not unusual for him to personally greet concert-goers as they come on board the ship. He often interlaces his performances with humorous and informative anecdotes about the pieces being played which give his concerts a particularly spontaneous, spirited quality. His friendly banter with the audience can also put the novice concert-goer at ease and removes any stereotype that chamber

music recitals can be stuffy or somewhat remote affairs.

Bargemusic presents over 200 concerts a year and offers varied and adventurous programs. In addition to classical chamber music, the venue also schedules numerous jazz concerts. The venue has also emerged as a major forum for new music through its "Here and Now" series which features compositions by contemporary composers. All of the concerts - whether jazz, contemporary, or classical - feature world-class musicians.

This writer attended a memorable matinee concert last December 6 which featured a program that ran the full musical spectrum of a Haydn string trio to a world premiere. In addition to Mr. Peskanov, the concert featured cellist Sophie Shao and pianist Doris Stevenson. As a measure of the quality of the musicians that Bargemusic regularly features, Ms. Shao was the top winner of the 2001 Rostropovich cello competition as well as the winner of the 2002 Tchaikovsky competition. Doris Stevenson, an esteemed veteran of the concert stage, has performed with such luminaries as cellist Gregor Piatigorsky and the legendary violinist Jascha Heifetz.

In addition to the Haydn trio, the concert included a vibrant performance of Roger Sessions' 1966 composition Six Pieces for Cello whose demanding pyrotechnics were ably navigated by Ms. Shao. The performance also included a memorable rendition of Mendelssohn's Sonata No. 2 in D Major for Cello and Piano, Op. 58 as well as a particularly spirited performance of Brahms' dramatic Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101.

In keeping with the eclectic programming of the afternoon, the concert also included a world premiere Arietta for Violin and Piano by composer Peter Heller (1926-2006). The Arietta is a wonderfully elegiac piece and it is clear that Mr. Heller had a remarkable, introspective lyrical gift. Mr. Peskanov and Ms. Stevenson gave the piece a particularly soulful and sensitive reading whose effect was highlighted by the poignant twilight descending on the East River. One can only hope that Arietta will soon be recorded and that other compositions by Mr. Heller will continue to be performed and explored.

While attending an evening performance at Bargemusic offers a glittering view of Manhattan's skyline, afternoon performances have their own charming, distinctive ambiance. The graceful flight of the seagulls outside the barge's windows seemed to be choreographed by the elegant phrases of the Haydn and Heller compositions.

Jazz aficionados will also enjoy Bargemusic. Upcoming performers include Liz Magnes and the Carlos Cuevas Trio. The concert calendar for all performances can be viewed on Bargemusic's website www.bargemusic.org. Tickets normally range in price from \$25-\$40 with discounts available for students and seniors.

The wedding of marvelous scenery and great music always produces a magical effect. Bargemusic is perfect for jaded New Yorkers who need a relaxing escape. For Manhattanites it is easily accessible through the first Brooklyn stop of the A Train at High St. It is also convenient for Brooklynners needing a musical respite on their way home from work.

Early in the 1700's, English King George I enjoyed hearing music on a royal barge in the Thames River from which Handel's famous Water Music Suites emerged. While they may not be of royal birth, New Yorkers can enjoy a similar elegant, memorable experience on Bargemusic which is a unique and enlivening venue in the city's musical scene.

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Last updated: New York, NY • March 3, 2010 • by Paul Hansen

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Accessed: March 5, 2010