



Narek Arutyunian, *clarinetist*

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Concert Review: Clarinetist Narek Arutyunian at the Kennedy Center

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The clarinet is a tricky instrument, challenging the player with some treacherous hurdles to overcome. If the lowest notes are blown with an indiscriminate fortissimo, the instrument honks like a Canada goose. If the upper range is handled carelessly, its warbling sounds pierce the human ear like an out-of-tune air-raid siren. But the 19-year-old Armenian-born clarinetist Narek Arutyunian shows complete command of his instrument.

At his Washington debut Tuesday at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater, Arutyunian's deepest notes were at once vibrant and enveloping. His highest range had the clarity of a vibrant coloratura.

With his remarkable pianist, Steven Beck, Arutyunian opened with Francis Poulenc's Sonata, Op. 184, Jean Francaix's Tema con Variazione and Carl Maria von Weber's Grand Duo Concertante in E flat, Op. 48. The second half of the program included Joseph Horowitz's Sonatina, an arrangement of Paul Schoenfield's Four Souvenirs and Edison Denisov's Sonata for solo clarinet.

The event was sponsored by the Young Concert Artists series, which has launched such musicians as Emanuel Ax, Pinchas Zukerman and the Tokyo String Quartet into major careers. And the series has picked another winner.

Arutyunian's playing reaches passionate depths with seemingly effortless technical prowess, beguiling sensitivity and an energetic stage presence. He plunged up and down his instrument with gleaming homogeneity, propelling the Poulenc at lightning speed in the allegros and, in the Romanza, portraying the composer's signature casual air with utmost fluidity and meaningful phrasing.

Arutyunian exposed a similar Gallic wit as in Francaix's bizarre waltz and dazzling cadenza. Both musicians gave an elegant account of von Weber's rather superficial duo, impeccably surmounting its virtuoso difficulties.

The performers lost none of Horowitz's blues color and jazzy rhythm interplay — perfect Benny Goodman fare. In the Denisov, Arutyunian exhibited the clarinet's endless vocabulary of effects — flutter tongue, micro-tones and wobbling tremolos. The Schoenfield offered a feisty set of stylized Latin dances and a Tin Pan Alley movement of unabashed swing.



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