



Stephen Waarts, violinist

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Violinist Stephen Waarts displays his phenomenal technique in 'Gift to the Community' Concert

-Garaud MacTaggart | *The Buffalo News* | November 10, 2014

Once again the Buffalo Chamber Music Society's Sunday afternoon "Gift to the Community" concerts in Kleinhans Music Hall have proven to be an invaluable way of showcasing new, young talent before an audience that might never have heard of them before.

The program this time featured violinist Stephen Waarts who has studied with two titans of the instrument, Itzhak Perlman and Aaron Rosand. One has to assume that those guys saw potential and, based on Sunday's performance, they would have been right. Waarts is phenomenal from a technical standpoint and his interpretive skills are already at a high level.

Word must have gotten out into the community about Waarts' abilities because the room was packed, something that doesn't necessarily happen when the Bills' games are televised or played out at The Ralph.

It should be noted that the violinist was not the only performer on the docket. Pianist Chelsea Wang was wonderful in support but saying that shouldn't imply that she was anything other than superb in her role, so much so that a solo recital featuring her talents would probably be rewarding, too.

The program opened with Ludwig van Beethoven's Violin Sonata in G major (op. 30, no. 3), the performance of which augured well for the rest of the concert. It featured an allegro with sharply detailed playing from both musicians which led into the formal beauty of the minuet and finished off with another allegro that raced to a more than satisfactory ending.

Waarts then opted for one of the more challenging scores from the last century, Bela Bartok's Sonata for Solo Violin. It's an important work from the back end of the composer's life and also the last chamber music piece he wrote. Technical challenges abound and the sonata doesn't bloom without a talent that can turn those challenges into art. Luckily, this at-times thorny score was in good hands this time.

After the intermission, Waarts and Wang reveled in a couple of pieces by Maurice Ravel – the Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major and the "Piece en forme de Habanera."

In the sonata, the violinist found a way to make the opening notes rise from a barely perceptible place and float over the piano's piquant sonic underpinning. The second movement – titled "Blues" – was not the sort of thing that blues/jazz violinists like Butch Cage or Stuff Smith would have played, but Ravel's writing for the piano had elements of the genre hovering in the background while the concluding movement was played as if a nest of bees had been stirred up, driving the piece to an energetic conclusion.

The short "Habanera" wore its Hispanic influences well and with Franz Waxman's "Fantasy on Themes from 'Carmen,'" provided some agreeable fireworks to close the set. The audience left the hall, after a brief encore, fully sated. It was probably better than watching the Bills game.