



## Stephen Waarts, *violinist*



### Young Festival del Sole violinist on the brink of stardom

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For one of the early performances in the now popular Bouchaine Young Artist Series, Festival del Sole producers invited a young Bay Area violinist to perform. The 12-year-old student not only impressed the festival audience, he made series sponsors Gerret and Tatiana Copeland, owners of Bouchaine Vineyards, sit up and take notice.

Last week, the festival invited him to return – now 2 meters tall, a student at the renowned Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and winner of two of the most prestigious competitions in the world, taking the coveted first prizes at the 2013 Young Concert Artists International Auditions and 2014 Yehudi Menuhin International Violin Competition.

The lanky Dutch-American is quickly earning an international reputation as one of the most prodigiously gifted young concert artists to emerge in recent years.

After listening to a program that included Schubert, Prokofiev and Ravel, the full house at Jarvis Conservatory recognized this performance was one to cherish. Not only because it was offered free of charge but because each and every one in the venue knew they'd seen a young man on the brink of stardom. "The next Joshua Bell," someone called out departing the intimate concert hall.

Prokofiev's "Violin Sonata No. 2 in D Major, Op. 94a," was based on the composer's own "Flute Sonata in D, Op. 94," written in 1942 but arranged for violin in 1943 when Prokofiev was living in the Ural Mountains, a remote shelter for Soviet artists during World War II. Among those present at the world premiere of the sonata in 1943 was friend and violinist David Oistrakh who later persuaded Prokofiev to arrange the work for violin and piano. Prokofiev's original intentions notwithstanding, Oistrakh's suggestion of a violin arrangement was most propitious and this sonata remains a mainstay of both the violin and flute repertoires. The sonata in its violin rendition was premiered by Oistrakh in Moscow the following year. The transcription betrays little of its grim wartime origins, mixing Prokofiev's lyrical warmth with his playful mischief.

Waarts accented the French lyricism of the opening movement and the playful Scherzo showed off its gypsy colors. The young violinist captured beautifully the serenity of the Andante and underscored the composer's dancelike flights of fancy in the Finale. We loved Waart's tonal purity, along with his remarkable range of expressive colors.

The opening work, Franz Schubert's "Sonata in D Major, D. 574," couldn't have contrasted more. Offering evidence of maturing lyricism, the piece displayed Beethoven's influence but also the composer's endearing tunefulness.

Waarts caught the dreamy, other-worldly quality of even the simplest phrases, and pianist Miles Graber – who proved a worthy partner throughout the performance – was equally adept at the mood changes and harmonic surprises one expects in Schubert.

Their rapport was evident as well for Maurice Ravel's "Tzigane," the composer's idea of what romantic violin showmanship should sound like. While not incorporating actual gypsy melodies, the work does sound quite exotic. The very talented young violinist offered a jaw-droppingly virtuosic performance of intensity, exoticism and vibrant melody.

In addition to a lovely gypsy-styled piece from violinist Fritz Kreisler, "La Gitana," Waarts also charmed his new Napa fan club with a spellbinding performance of "Meditation," from Massenet's "Thais," one of the loveliest encore pieces ever. By this time, Stephen Waarts could do no wrong.

I have a feeling the next time locals see and hear young Stephen Waarts, we'll be buying a ticket to a performance in a much larger concert hall.