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News Article

Mesa Street Trio and Valentine ballet

By Betty Ligon



Any time the name of piano professor Oscar Macchioni shows up in one of the faculty recitals at the University of Texas at El Paso, I try to be in the audience. He and the trenchant Mesa Street Trio performed in the series of faculty programs Jan. 7.

The Mesa trio is made up of UTEP faculty members Lesley Chen, violin; Benjamin Wickers, cell; and Macchioni, piano.

One feather in the cap of UTEP's Music Department – over the last decade of so – is the addition of teachers whose origins reflect countries other than the U.S.

We're used to the added diversity of Mexican music, but Macchioni is a native of Argentina. Lyric soprano Carmen Diaz Walker, who also appeared in this program, was born in Puerto Rico.

That does not imply that musicians of foreign heritage perform only music from their background. But often it gives their interpretation a more authentic ring.

Macchioni is a sublime pianist with a deft touch. His first two pieces were by Liszt; a not very interesting "Funerailles" contained a solemn march that sounded more like pounding with heavy pedaling, and a short, romantic "Forgotten Waltz No. 1." Its unusual finish left the audience unsure when to clap.

Karol Szymanowski's "Preludes op. 1" in four movements were bright and beautiful, ending in a flurry of broken chords, tricky fingering and pedaling.

The Mesa Street Trio presented a flamboyant "Circulo op. 91" by Joaquin Turina that circled the day from an indulgent awakening, to a lively midday filled with Spanish idioms, to a winding down of energy at dusk. Well done!

Walker, accompanied by Macchioni, sang two sets of songs by contemporary composer Carlos Guastavino (1912-2000), "Flores Argetinas" from poems by Leon Benaros. and "Cuatro Canciones" typical of Argentina's instruments and folk melodies.

Her limpid, expressive delivery suited the melodic background of the art songs praising flowers and romance.

Dancing news

Ingeborg Heuser, longtime ballet director and choreographer with UTEP's Music Department, has retired from that position. But she is still sharing her talent with young dancers.

Marta Katz, director of the El Paso Conservatory of Dance, has formed a school, the El Paso Youth Ballet. Ingeborg can be found there as a special assistant and adviser to Marta.

Other teachers include Laura Hamlin and Oskar Antunez, former primo dancer with Ingeborg's El Paso Ballet back in the 1960s.

I attended a Valentine's Day performance of Marta's El Paso Youth Ballet at Coronado Country Club and was pleased to see the genesis of a new ballet company.

The program began with the familiar look and sounds of "Waltz of the Flowers" from Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker," danced with consistent precision by the advanced division.

The intermediate division dancers followed, with eight students as young as 7 in a cute "Sailor Dance."

They were also cleverly choreographed in a version of "Can Can" with Offenbach's music.

The evening's highlight was a lovely solo, "Pizzicato," beautifully danced by Lauren Hamrick Yoshawirja to music by Johann Strauss.

She's a former student of Ingeborg's who now teaches at Katz's conservatory. Other noteworthy solo dancers were Isabella Rodriguez, Cassandra Martin and Ariela Katz.

The finale was a delightful nod to Valentine's Day. A male dancer from the advanced division, Anthony Anchondo, teased Katz, Rodriguez and Kira Viola in a sparkling game of romantic tag, the girls in red and white clown costumes, and the amorous male in green knickers.

It was a charming evening. The music was performed live by six members of the Youth Symphony Orchestra from Ysleta schools, conducted by Phillip Gabriel Garcia.

Speaking of Ingeborg, I am pleased to see she will be installed in the El Paso Women's Hall of Fame in the arts category at the hall's annual banquet March 20. It's about time!



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