

Genius found

Unraveling the work of composer Marcel Tyberg

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In the 1960s and 1970s, the influence of the dynamic Lukas Foss made Buffalo one of the world's most prominent centers for the discovery and dissemination of new music.

Now, some four decades later, Buffalo again has a pivotal position in a musical discovery of a wholly different nature.

We're talking about the discovery, first announced in *The News* in February, that the entire life's work of an obscure but extremely talented Austrian composer named Marcel Tyberg (pronounced TEE-berg), who perished in the Holocaust, has been in Buffalo since 1957. It is the property of Dr. Enrico Mihich, a distinguished research scientist at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. Together with JoAnn Falletta and others, Mihich has established the Tyberg Musical Legacy Fund to help get Tyberg's music publicized and performed. It is being administered by Buffalo's Foundation for Jewish Philanthropies.

For the record, the main body of Tyberg scores in Mihich's possession consists of three symphonies, a completion of Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony, two piano sonatas, a string sextet, a piano trio, two masses and some 35 lieder. Of all these works, the only one given a significant public performance during Tyberg's lifetime was the Symphony No. 2, which was premiered in the late 1930s by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Rafael Kubelik.

To implement publicity, performances and recordings, the fund has announced a campaign with a goal of \$250,000.

The decision was made that the initial focus would be on the two piano sonatas. On March 1, pianist Katya Grineva played the premiere performances of both sonatas in Buffalo's Temple Beth Zion. The next day, she made professional recordings of both sonatas in Kleinhans Music Hall



Robert Kirkham/Buffalo News

Russian pianist Katya Grineva performs music by Marcel Tyberg during a recital at Temple Beth Zion.

for release in the fall.

The first performance before an international audience was on June 1, when Grineva concluded a recital in New York City's Carnegie Hall with Tyberg's Piano Sonata No. 1.

I had the opportunity to hear a private recording of the Temple Beth Zion performances dozens of times, and I feel that these sonatas are extraordinarily interesting music.

They are large works, both highly dramatic and expressively lyrical, with Tyberg revealing a mastery of musical architecture and the winning ability to provide terse, memorable themes and thrillingly effective key modulations that shift the plane of the music suddenly up or down, often with disarming surprise.

It should be added that Tyberg's style is very conservative. Although the sonatas were completed in 1920 and 1934, they speak in a tonal and expressive language that could be described as redolent of Brahms and Schumann, with only a hint of 20th century sonority and brilliance.

During Grineva's Carnegie Hall recital, it was apparent to me that her understanding and command of the big-handed Sonata No. 1 had deepened noticeably since the Temple Beth Zion performance. The audience discarded conventional concert decorum, applauded between the movements and unleashed volleys of shouts and cheers at the end.

I thought she had earned that sort of enthusiasm, but New

York Times critic Bernard Holland took a somewhat dimmer view. While acknowledging Tyberg's mastery of sonata form, he thought some of the drama was mere rhetoric and felt that Grineva's artistic strength was in more intimate music, which left her unsuited for Tyberg's "grand pianistic gestures."

In other plans, Falletta has said that BPO musicians will perform both the String Sextet and the Piano Trio in Buffalo in late October or early November.

Farther down the line, Falletta is excited about a BPO premiere of Tyberg's Symphony No. 3. Although Mihich has a contact who will be able to have the individual musicians' parts ready later this year, Falletta cautions that the premiere will have to wait until 2007-08 because the programs for the upcoming 2006-07 season are already cast in stone.

While the emergence of Tyberg's music after 62 years under the Mihich family's care is of great interest to serious lovers of serious music, its importance to the music world at large may take a few years to unravel. Are the chamber music works and the Symphony No. 3 going to prove as fulfilling as I have found the two piano sonatas? Will the sonatas find acceptance among other pianists and a larger audience? How about the 35 lieder, whose future performances and recordings are now under negotiation?

Only time will tell. ●