

Belsky-Maxwell Duo at the Blackstone Library

By M.L. RANTALA
Classical Music Critic

The Blackstone Branch of the Chicago Public Library (4904 S. Lake Park Ave.) is the oldest of the CPL branches, created more than a century ago. It's not just a symphony for the eyes, modeled as it is after the famous Erechtheum of the Acropolis, but at times it can please the ears, as well. This weekend I had a lovely treat when I found myself in the basement auditorium of the Blackstone Branch for a Sunday afternoon recital by the Belsky-Maxwell Duo.

Svetlana Belsky and Jennifer Maxwell, both on the staff of the University of Chicago's Department of Music, could have little guessed that a jolly and impromptu sit-down at the keyboard at a party would less than a year later turn into a partnership that saw a standing-room-only crowd in Mandel Hall when they served as soloists in Mozart's Concerto for Two Pianos with the University of Chicago Symphony Orchestra last January.

Sunday's was a considerably more modest event, not simply because it was only one piano, four-hands, but also because the stately Blackstone Library's auditorium is really only an average-sized room full of uncomfy chairs painted an eye-gouging yellow.

But these young ladies were game. Unquestionably the big moment of the afternoon was Schubert's "Fantasy in F Minor," probably the most popular work in the piano duet repertoire, and a masterful, magisterial piece to boot. It was here that these two women, very different in background (one born in the Soviet Union, the other the United States) showed how artistically attuned they were to each other. They simultaneously moved from the serene to the staccato, from the merely fast to the positively furious, always at precisely the same time. As you might expect with four hands at a single piano, there was

big sound, but they surrounded it with force and power, not mere volume. Interestingly enough, these two slender women explained that they had to re-write some of the music in order that their bodies not become tangled trying to play the music. One wonders how pairs of beefy men manage without resorting to blows.

Their recital opened with Ravel's transcription of Debussy's "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun." The composer's original orchestral tone poem includes some magnificent flute solos, and the airiness of those passages can't be adequately captured by piano. Yet the interesting way he tracks the orchestra onto the piano reveals Ravel's ear for color. Belsky and Maxwell might have been overly strong at the keyboard, but only marginally so.

The last announced work on the program was Samuel Barber's "Souvenirs," six dances that display the composer's fluidity and grace, as well as his sense of humor. The opening "Waltz," the longest of the dances, tripped lightly and they made the cute ending something to smile about. The "Pas de deux" offered a charming display of the women chasing each other's kitten-like fingers up the keyboard. Both the "Hesitation-Tango" and the "Galop" were performed with flair.

Their encore was the last movement of Debussy's "Petit Suite," full of gauzy dreams and flowing waltzes.

You can hear this very same program this week, when the Belsky-Maxwell Duo reprises it for free at the Noontime Concert Series in Fulton Recital Hall (1010 E. 59th St., fourth floor), Thursday, Jan. 11 at 12:15 p.m.

They will also be performing a bigger recital (including some works for two pianos) on Sat. Jan. 13 at 3 p.m. in the PianoForte Chicago Series in the Fine Arts Building downtown. Tickets are \$10 (only \$5 per woman, Maxwell quips) and can be purchased online at pianofortechicago.com.

music



Belsky-Maxwell Duo, from left: Jennifer Maxwell and Svetlana Belsky.

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Cornell high rise stalled

Demo of vacant building set for spring

By NYKEYA WOODS
Staff Writer

A proposed \$70 million high rise for Cornell Avenue and 53rd Street is stalled because, according to its developer, building costs have skyrocketed over the last two years.

Fernando Leal, managing partner

of L3 Development LLC, who purchased the property at 1600-20 E. 53rd St. in May 2005, gave an update of his 17.5-story building at Monday night's 53rd Street Tax Increment Financing Advisory Council meeting.

The cost of construction, Leal said, has risen 35 percent in the last two

years. He said his firm has received three bids from construction companies L3 has worked with in the past. He is expected to come before the TIF council in June, when a decision may be reached.

In the meantime, demolition of the current two and three story buildings that occupy the property will occur

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53rd St. Co-op closes

Hyde Park Produce lease still pending

By NYKEYA WOODS
Staff Writer

The Hyde Park Co-op Express, 1226 E. 53rd St., closed Saturday as the University of Chicago and Hyde Park Produce enter the final stages of a lease agreement.

Co-op Board Vice President Jim



Marian Despres, 1909-2007

