

Go! Music

String quartet named best in the West

Anyone who cares about music in Victoria knows just how great and significant has been the contribution of the **Lafayette String Quartet** since their arrival in Victoria a dozen years ago. Whether it is their own playing or that of their many students, there can be no doubting that music-making here would have been greatly the poorer for their absence.

I am delighted to be able to report that the Lafayette's sterling qualities were recognized on Sunday evening Regina when their recording of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* won the Outstanding Classical Recording category at the Western Canadian Music Awards: a verdict with which everybody who heard their superb performances of the work last weekend will surely agree.

Congratulations to them and long may they continue to grace our city.

In the 17th and 18th centuries the practise of castrating boys before puberty in order to preserve their voices was, although clandestine, widespread. Many important roles in operas still heard today were originally written for the voices of these "musicos" or "eviratos" (literally "unmanned") as they were euphemistically known. Handel and Mozart, for example, both wrote for castrato voices.

While today we rightly abhor such a barbaric practise, I should just mention that many castrati were very successful indeed with the ladies: in an age of no reliable contraception, a man who could do everything except make the lady pregnant could prove very popular indeed.

The last known genuine castrato was Alessandro Moreschi (1858-1922) who actually made some recordings in 1902-3. Despite the primitive recording "the passionate yet curiously disembodied quality of his voice is apparent" according to Thomas Walker.

There are, of course, no genuine castrati around today — although the possibility is a plot device in a mystery novel by Robert Barnard (if memory serves, the delightfully named *Death on the High C's*) — but with the rise of interest in early music and period performance over the past few decades has come

an accompanying wave of male singers using their falsetto range to sing castrato parts.

All of which is by way of introduction to this weekend's season opener from the *Early Music Society of the Islands* (hereinafter, as the lawyers say, referred to as EMSI): *Twilight of the Castrati*, featuring singer **Angelo Manzotti** accompanied by guitarist **David Rogers**.

Manzotti, who won the Pavarotti prize in 1992, calls himself a "male soprano" rather than the more usual "countertenor," as he employs his own vocal techniques which he developed in order to maintain his boy-soprano range while developing his adult voice. As a result he now has a range of some five (!) octaves: the usual range of a modern piano is just over seven.

Rogers is a member of the Terra Nova Consort and also lutenist-in-residence at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. The program will feature Italian music of the late 18th century, by composers such as Cresentini, Millicco, Pacini, Portogallo and Sor.

Saturday's concert takes place in the Alix Goolden Performance Hall (not EMSI's usual venue) beginning at 8 p.m. Tickets are available from the McPherson box offices, Galliard Music, Munro's Books and Ivy's Bookstore or at the door. For more information visit the EMSI Web site at <http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/earlymusic> or call 882-5058.

Finally, Sunday afternoon brings the opening concert of the second season of *A Celebration of Chamber Music*, which this year has relocated to St. Mary's Church, Oak Bay.

Series Artistic Director and violinist **Klement Hambourg**, will be joined by **Lanny Pollet**, flute; cellist **Martin Bonham** and **Nicholas Fairbank**, harpsichord and piano, for an eclectic concert which, as the saying goes, covers a good deal of territory.

There will be music by Bach, Beethoven and Bloch — and that's just the B's.

The concert begins at 2:30. Tickets are available at Ivy's, Munro's, Cadboro Bay Book Shop, Long & McQuade and at the door. For more information e-mail hambourg@pacific-coast.net or call 598-7726.



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