

Santa Barbara – Kotor Sister City Exchange

Lingua Franca: Santa Barbara and Kotor Musicians Make Music Together

Review by Daniel Kepl / VOICE

IN 1956, PRESIDENT DWIGHT EISENHOWER LAUNCHED HIS PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE PROGRAM promoting friendship between countries regardless of race, creed, nationality, or color. The Sister City program has contributed to world peace by encouraging a vision of the planet and its many cultures as less confusing and more cohesive. Since 1956, Santa Barbara has made friends with seven sister cities including Kotor, Montenegro. Under the leadership of Founding Chairman and Co-Chair George and Denise Lilly, regular exchanges between Santa Barbara and Kotor have taken place since 2009, including visits between water polo teams, theater groups, and culinary schools. Montenegrin classical musicians, including pianist Ratimir Martinovic, have been a regular part of the Santa Barbara-Kotor Sister City exchanges as well, presenting recitals on two or three occasions since 2009.



Violinist **Nastasja Vojinovic**

(Montenegro), violinist/violist Sara Bashore (Santa Barbara), cellist Katrina Agate (Santa Barbara), and violinist Nastasja Vojinovic (Montenegro), despite meeting to rehearse together for the first time only days earlier, played as one mind for a thoughtful and duly appreciative audience.

Originally scored for two violins, cello, and harmonium, Dvorak's *Bagatelles, Op. 46 (1878)* opened the program. Performed these days with piano replacing the harmonium, violinists Bashore and Vojinovic, cellist Agate, and pianist Jovovic found immediate interpretive common ground in the first bagatelle of the set, *Allegretto Scherzando*, warming to each other still more in the second *Tempo di Minuetto, Grazioso*. As ensemble cohesion became more confident, blend and balance more focused, a vibrant energy and more nuanced discourse also evolved. By the *Andante*

A promising new collaboration between the Santa Barbara-Kotor Sister City organization and UC Santa Barbara's Department of Music was inaugurated last Friday night in Weinman Hall at the Music Academy of the West, which promises to significantly increase contacts between musicians in the two cities. With funding from the SJL Foundation, four young professional musicians – two from Santa Barbara and two from Montenegro – came together for the first time to present a recital of music by Dvorak, Shostakovich, Fauré, and Mozart.

Music is indeed humanity's lingua franca and the quartet of pianist Andrija Jovovic



Cellist **Katrina Agate**



Pianist **Andrija Jovovic**, Violonist **Sara Bashore**, Violinist **Nastasja Vojinovic**, and Cellist **Katrina Agate**.



Violonist **Sara Bashore**

con moto, the fourth bagatelle, one could sense a golden moment had arrived, the disparate musicians having found their collective sweet spot. A gorgeous wealth of color, dependent always on trust and consensus as much as technical prowess, filled the room with the wonder of the last bagatelle *Poco allegro*. Its playful galop and fascinating trio section, performed with gusto by the four musicians now colleagues, gave the audience a beautiful example of music's indomitable connectivity with all souls.

Dmitri Shostakovich's assistant Lev Atovmian arranged many of the composer's works for various instrumentations over the years, all with the composer's blessing, including *Five Pieces for Two Violins and Piano*, the second work on the SB-Kotor program. Drawn from music Shostakovich composed for various other projects, like the film *The Gadfly (Prelude)*; the *Third Ballet Suite (Gavotte and Elegy)*; a cartoon film *The Tale of the Priest and*

his Servant Balda (Waltz), and the *First Ballet Suite (Polka)*, the *Five Pieces* are, if nothing else, a sentimental musical journey most of us have never heard. More powerfully, these settings to images of peasant life and summer harvests – a Russia between the two World Wars – is both fun and bittersweet. Violinists Vojinovic and Bashore, with pianist Jovovic, were in particularly sensitive liaison, giving the pieces their nostalgic due with colorful dollops of panache, including lots of stylish playing in the *Gavotte*, a subtle understanding of the Viennese waltz rhythm from Jovovic, and a canny prescience about Shostakovich's sly winks and coy nods throughout the set, particularly in the last piece, *Polka*.

Gabriel Fauré's *Élégie for Cello and Piano, Op. 24 (1880)* found cellist Agate and pianist Jovovic in excellent partnership, executing Fauré's lamentations, as well as his busier riffs with characterful aplomb. Mozart's signature *Piano Quartet in G minor, K. 478* brought the program full circle with all four artists (Bashore switching from violin to viola) offering sterling performances of its three movements. Rich ensemble playing, intelligent phrasing and embellishment, very little pedal from the pianist (thanks), and excellent balancing and voice leading throughout, produced a polished performance.

Post-recital catering by Goran Milic, guiding light of the culinary aspect of the Santa Barbara-Kotor Sister City exchanges, served by members of the Santa Barbara water polo club who will visit Kotor this summer, gave credence to the ecumenical nature of the Santa Barbara-Kotor Sister City programs.



Pianist **Andrija Jovovic**

Daniel Kepl has been writing music, theatre, and dance reviews or Santa Barbara publications since he was a teenager. His professional expertise is as an orchestra conductor.

For more reviews by Daniel Kepl visit: www.performingartsreview.net

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