

CLARINETIST, EMBATTLED ORCHESTRA SHINE IN CONCERT

The future of the Baltimore Chamber Orchestra, a fixture on the local scene for more than 25 years, remains uncertain. After being hit hard by a drop in ticket sales and contributed income, the organization has suspended operations for the remainder of this season, in the hope that fundraising will be successful enough to re-launch in the fall. The unfortunate cloud over the BCO lifted for a couple of bright hours on Sunday afternoon at Kraushaar Auditorium, where the ensemble delivered its swan-song-for-now.

A near-capacity crowd, the largest BCO audience I've seen in quite a while, was on hand, and rewarded the musicians with a standing ovation before they played a note, to thank them for donating their services to save the concert. The conductor and soloist also donated theirs.



That guest artist, eminent clarinet virtuoso Richard Stoltzman, gave a sublime, time-stopping account of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, reaffirming the technical mastery and refined musicality that made him a star in the mid-1970s. Stoltzman's silken tone spun Mozart's exquisite melodies with seemingly effortless grace, especially in the Adagio, which also benefited from the clarinetist's stylish ornamentation of the five-note descending theme that ranks among the most poignant of all Mozart inspirations. BCO music director Markand Thakar (he has donated back his salary all season) dovetailed the orchestral side of the concerto with considerable sensitivity, and the ensemble did some downright glowing work.

As if Stoltzman's remarkable gesture of performing free for the BCO weren't enough, he added a substantial encore, Poulenc's saucy, compact Sonata for Two Clarinets, with Eyal Bor, director of education for the Beth El Congregation and an accomplished player. (The BCO originally was to have performed the program at Beth El, as well as Kraushaar.)

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