

## **Cello and Piano Make Magic in Prescott** by Howard Alexander

"I came for the magic" one audience member said. The Cheng<sup>2</sup> Duo provided plenty of magic at the Fort Town Concert Association concert last Friday.

Silvie Cheng, a recent Master's graduate of the Manhattan School of Music in New York, and her brother Bryan Cheng, now studying in Berlin, live on the world stage. Friday, they brought the world to Prescott in a bravura performance. Canada's greatest exports are our artists.

A program of all Russian music is very demanding on the audience as well as the performers. Extremes of emotion within just a few bars of music take an engaged audience on an exhausting emotional roller coaster when captivated by such masters of their craft.

The program began innocently enough with Tchaikovsky. The "Pezzo capriccioso" and the "Andante cantabile" from String Quartet No. 1 are both popular and familiar. These delightful warm up pieces welcomed the audience to relax and enjoy.

Prokofiev's Sonata moved the tension level up a notch. This demanding work requires the cellist to play in a very aggressive percussive style with the heavy strummed chords, and at other times with puckish tongue in cheek humour. The Chengs captured the prevailing sense of melancholy with the ease and confidence of the accomplished professionals that they are.

Although the audience rested during intermission, there was a sense of anticipation crackling in the air; the sense that the first half was merely a build up for what was to come.

The second half began with the very frequently recorded "Vocalise" by Rachmaninoff. For this reviewer, the performance was a bit over the top. There did not seem to be enough time to luxuriate in the finely nuanced cello line. But we all knew the fireworks were next. As good as everything else had been to this point, the Rachmaninoff Sonata surpassed it all.

Rachmaninoff was a virtuoso pianist and his compositions require a virtuoso to play them, in this case two virtuosos, one pianist and one cellist. The first movement was exciting. The second movement brilliant.

And then came rapture. The true magic happened in the "Andante". It was other-worldly. Here was a prime case of synergy where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Hauntingly loving caresses, pain and joy in every note and every phrase, music such as you rarely hear. This was the most exquisite playing this reviewer has heard all year. Bravo!

The last movement belonged to pianist Silvie Cheng. The strength, the power, the delicate soft contrasts, the breathtaking technique combined to be everything anyone could ask for.

Usually at FTCA concerts the pianist is required to perform on less than concert fit pianos. Fortunately, last night the FTCA had arranged for a Steinway nine-foot concert grand for

Silvie to play. The Rachmaninoff Sonata would not have been possible without that instrument.

The audience leaped to their feet with well-earned prolonged applause at the end of the concert. The Cheng<sup>2</sup> Duo are magical.