Organist enchants at Community Concert

By Molly Doolittle
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REVIEW

Technique met technology in an almost perfect marriage of performer to instrument at Thursday's organ Community Concert.

The audience was entranced, and even J.S. Bach presumably refrained from rolling over in his grave, though he might have been sitting up and taking notice of Aram Basmadjian, pipe organist extraordinaire who played a computerized, digital four-manual organ he brought with him on a full-length tractor-trailer he drove here himself.

For six years, the musician has been on nine month-long national tours a year, performing on an instrument that only occasionally, in a slight speaker buzz, betrayed its technological dependencies.

Choosing from traditional organ literature, Basdmadjian's numbers at the Consistory auditorium ranged from the baroque style of Bach and Tommaso Albinoni to the contemporary sounds of Marcel Dupre and Louis Vierne. With enormous energy, finicky attention to detail and interesting dynamic contrasts, Basmadjian tackled Bach's Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C Major, the main work of the evening.

Jumping onto the organ bench like a teen-ager and sliding into place, the lively 28-year-old performer played Albinoni's gentle "Adagio in G Minor" with the same finesse, polish and dynamic contrast as Vierne's swashbuckling "Finale" from the Sixth Symphony. There were times when his hands and feet, performing trills, turns and arpeggios, were a blur, and occasionally, he appeared to be doing the Charleston.

His encores were a Eugene Gigout toccata and, the pop number of the evening, "The Girl from Ipenema."

Basmadjian made humorous asides between numbers — about playing without music because he left his scores in South Dakota, and anticipating audiences' tendency to find organ music "extremely boring." Though listeners laughed, the comments seemed unnecessarily self-deprecating, for this audience, anyway.

But the short primer this ambassador for organ gave on his $150,000 instrument was as interesting as it was informative.

In the lobby at intermission and afterwards, a crush of concertgoers flocked to Basmadjian's wife of four months, Carrie, to buy tapes and compact disks of his playing. Gum-chewing and sweatshirt-clad, she afterward aided in packing up for a drive to Rochelle for driving permits for the rented tractor that replaces his own, which was wrecked recently in bad weather in Montana. The organ takes about an hour-and-a-half to set up.

"I couldn't do it without her," he said, though his parents toured with him before his marriage. In addition to holding a commercial driver's license, Basmadjian has electronics training for minor instrument repairs.

Admission to the community concerts is by subscription only. Subscriptions are $30 for adults; $15 for students and $75 for a family. They may be purchased by calling Cynthia Kubitz at 232-6430.

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