

Chamber vocalist's melodies fill Italian Academy



Courtesy of Lucy Shelton

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Upon entering the “teatro” of the Italian Academy with its ornate Neo-Renaissance style, one can hardly imagine sitting down to hear anything but classical music in its strictest sense. On Wednesday night, classical music did indeed fill the room, but not from the century that the ambience of the room would suggest.

Lucy Shelton, widely recognized as one of the great American vocalists, especially for performing and premiering important pieces of contemporary music, gave a vocal chamber music recital along with several other esteemed classical musicians. These renowned performers included Fred Sherry on cello, Stephen Taylor on oboe, Charles Neidich on clarinet, Curtis Macomber on violin, and

Jeffrey Milarsky, conductor. The concert, “Three 2nds with Lucy Shelton,” was the first of the Italian Academy’s Spring Concert Series. The following two concerts will be held on March 2 and April 2.

Columbia is home to many a classical music fan, but even the most dedicated might have reservations about attending a concert made up almost exclusively of works by 20th-century composers. Shelton, however, proved that contemporary vocal music can indeed be as warm, lyrical, and beautiful as music from any other period.

The concert began with a dedication to Milton Babbitt, a contemporary composer who died on Jan. 29. Shelton then proceeded with four short pieces, beginning with “Domenico Gabrielli’s Bellezza Tiranna” and ending with “Vuoi Tu, Ch’io Speri, Amore?”—both of which suited the traditional grandiose décor. Between these two works, however, listeners were transported through time. Harrison Birtwistle’s “Three Settings of Lorine Niedecker” and Morton Feldman’s “Four Songs to e.e. cummings” foreshadowed the rest of the concert, which consisted of music by 20th-century composers such as Elliott Carter, Warren Benson, and Luigi Dallapiccola.

While one may long for the melodicism of the Gabrielli pieces during the remainder of the concert, it is reassuring that Shelton’s voice loses none of the lyricism and beauty of the opening piece as the concert progresses. Classical music fans should not miss the second and third of the “Three 2nds.”