

PERFORMING ARTS

‘Becoming American’: An allegory of acceptance

Dana Tai Soon Burgess knows a haunting image when he sees one. His new work, “Becoming American,” opens with the small, expressionless face of an Asian child beamed onto a screen. As the camera pans out, it appears the child is holding a number, like a preschooler in a police lineup.

Korean orphan K85-869, now known as Katia Chupashko Norri, stood onstage at Dance Place below her own picture Friday night. She’s now 28 and ready to tell her adoption story through dance.

In the hands of a lesser choreographer, this piece could be a maudlin mess, the modern dance equivalent of an after-school special. But Burgess, a professor at George Washington University, is pretty much the best dancemaker around, and what he’s made here is a beautiful allegory about alienation and acceptance. Five ensemble dancers appear dressed all in black and wearing Japanese theater masks. They look as unsettling as a sea of white faces would to a 4-year-old fresh off the plane from Asia.

There’s more mime work than footwork in “Becoming American,” and while it’s interesting to see Burgess expand his vocabulary, the gestures are sometimes gratuitous and often unclear. There’s a striking scene of Norri in an English class, though, stretching nervously while a voiceover hisses the letter “S” and asks the students to repeat words like “spectacular.”

The work closes with the family at dinner. Kelly Moss Southall and Sarah Halzack play Norri’s graceful, loving parents. (Halzack, a Web producer at the Post, occasionally writes for Style.) They engage in an elaborate spoon-and-fork patty-cake while a confused Norri watches, then takes imaginary gulps from a rice bowl.

The parting image is of Norri embracing both her bowl and a plate. Like “Charlie Chan and the Mystery of Love,” the charming 2010 Burgess work also on the program, “Becoming American” feels a bit abbreviated. Good choreographers create a world and keep viewers there. Even when there are happy endings, it’s hard to walk away.

—Rebecca Ritzel

‘BraziliiAHN and Other Landscapes’

Still on a high from its command performance at a White House state dinner the previous evening, the Ahn Trio presented an energetic sampling of its cross-over catalog at the Barns at Wolf Trap in Vienna on Friday.

The group — Juilliard-trained sisters — has found a niche outside the traditional piano trio repertoire, working with (quoting its bio) “dancers, pop singers, DJ’s, electronic music artists, photographers, lighting designers, ecologists, and even kite makers.”

The program, “BraziliiAHN and Other Landscapes,” encompassed a slew of Brazilian pop arrangements and original works written for the trio, as well as other geographically inspired works by Americans Paul Schoenfield, Kenji Bunch and celebrated guitarist Pat Metheny. All were delivered with affection and commitment.

The performers didn’t appear to trust that anything would simply make its own musical case without verbal introduction. Nothing wrong with chatting about a piece before playing it, of course, but isn’t the whole point of moving from Dvorak and Ravel to pop and ethnic music that the latter supposedly connects more directly with the average listener?

The two pieces I found most enjoyable bookended the intermission: Bunch’s “Grooveboxes,” a wistful Broadway-inspired waltz followed by hard-driving, Bartokian rock; and Metheny’s “Yuryung,” little more than a melody with decorated chord changes, but deeply felt and sophisticated in its own way.

—Robert Battey

Emerson String Quartet

The Emerson String Quartet is one of the world’s blue-chip chamber groups, so perhaps it wasn’t a surprise that it turned in a superb and often deeply involving



↑ The Ahn Trio



Emerson String Quartet



Violinist Ji-Yoon Park

↓ Connie Lin Fink, top, and Katia Chupashko Norri from the Dana Tai Soon Burgess piece “Becoming American.”



ZAIN SHAH



The Hugo Wolf Quartett

NANCY HOROWITZ

performance on Saturday night at the National Museum of Natural History’s Baird Auditorium. What was a little surprising was the relative conservatism of the program — a well-worn path of late works by Mozart and Beethoven — but as it turned out, the conservatism was only skin deep.

Playing in their trademark standing positions, the Emersons opened with Mozart’s Adagio and Fugue in C Minor K. 546. Stately and rather formal, it’s not a partic-

ularly “Mozartean” piece, and the ensemble didn’t reveal any unexpected beauties in it — though the Fugue, which started with worrying slackness, built to a brilliant and furious close. It was with the composer’s Quartet in D, K. 575, though, that the Emersons displayed the insightful and absolutely crystalline playing that is their hallmark. Everything that you come to Mozart for — the profound logic that integrates every note, the delicate and closely observed emotions, the sly

glimpses of the sublime — was there; and though this was not exactly a risk-taking or passionate performance, it shone with intelligence and wit.

But the real reward came in the second half of the program, which was devoted to Beethoven’s monumental Quartet in B-flat, Op. 130, and the Grosse Fuge, Op. 133. And devoted is the word. It’s rare to hear such committed playing from any ensemble, and the Emersons tore so deeply into this work that it rang with jaw-dropping

power and authenticity; you could not tear your ears away. And if that were not enough, the concluding Grosse Fuge sounded as if it had been carved with sharp knives; played with the fury of a savage and slightly unhinged god, it was nothing less than astonishing.

—Stephen Brookes

Hugo Wolf Quartett

The Hugo Wolf Quartett came to play serious music, and it did so with severity of concentration and devotion to the craftsmanship of sound, devoid of theatrical contortion and hair-flipping. In the first concert of the season Saturday at Dumbarton Church in Georgetown, the mostly Austrian members of the string quartet (the second violinist was born in Switzerland) put all of their performance’s considerable drama and engagement into the music, rather than into their gestures and facial expressions.

Unlike some string quartets, these four musicians did not feel the need to scrape every last ounce of sound from the strings. Beginning with a glowing rendition of Schubert’s one-movement “Quartettsatz” in C Minor, D. 703, they played with a mellow amber tone that was carefully balanced and rarefied. The cello did not growl, the viola did not bark and the violins did not wail over the top of the ensemble. The intensity of the performance came from the fleet tempo and the rise and fall of expressive phrasing.

Schumann’s Quartet in F (Op. 41, No. 2) had a more restless quality. It is a less appealing piece than the ethereal Schubert, perhaps more neurotic, but the quartet gave it lightness and beauty, especially the rowdy fun of the fourth movement, playing that took risks, even if that meant dropping some notes along the way. Finally, the D minor string quartet of the group’s namesake, Hugo Wolf, was given a performance evoking the existential desperation of Goethe’s Faust. The playful scherzo of the second movement had dark overtones; the vivacious fourth movement was full of witty repartee; and the third movement featured the high chords of the three upper instruments, radiant like a pristine aureole.

—Charles T. Downey

Ji-Yoon Park

A costume change from tiered black to mostly red? Memorized music that freed her from the printed score? A shift from a German to a French voice? Who knows — maybe all three of these accounted for the metamorphosis that took place over the intermission break in violinist Ji-Yoon Park’s recital at the Kennedy Center’s Terrace Theater on Saturday sponsored by the Korean Concert Society.

In the first half, there was the stolid, unsmiling, finely honed instrumentalist who, with eyes on the score, played her way through the Mozart B-flat Sonata, K. 454 and the Brahms D Minor Sonata, Op. 108 with literal readings that never missed a marking but lacked the ineffable touches that can’t be notated, a sense of inevitability, the broadening of a line, the attention to phrase endings, the playfulness that makes music dance. It was a performance full of notes but little evidence of love or drama.

But the second half brought Park the musician to the stage. She put the music stand aside and spun out an account of the Chausson “Poeme” that glistened with longing. Her accompanist, Francois Dumont, who had struggled with uneven finger-work in the Mozart, found a wonderfully French-sounding wispy sonority in the opening chords and, together, the duo explored the score with a sense of freedom and evident pleasure.

Park’s take on Ravel’s G Sonata No. 2, which ended the program, seemed to be evolving. The blues slides were nicely weighted. The accents and athletic endurance so important in the finale’s chase scene were in hand, and Park seemed genuinely involved in Ravel’s idiom. She has the energy to play this piece. To give it real authority, what she needs is a sense of urgency.

—Joan Reinthaler

ASK AMY

Parental pressure for pre-nup rankles the bride

Dear Amy:

My fiancé and I are getting married in six months. He comes from an extremely wealthy family but is considerably wealthy in his own right.

We had already begun to make financial plans when his parents insisted that we get a prenuptial agreement.

I believe that a prenuptial agreement completely devalues a marriage. My fiancé and I decided against it and informed his parents. They then threatened to cut off my fiancé’s inheritance if we didn’t sign a prenup.

I hate that they’re controlling us like this. Should I accept that they’re going to cut off the inheritance and stick to my principles? Or should I disregard my values and sign the papers?

Anxious

I’m not sure how prenups “devalue” marriage, but many couples do find it challenging to basically plan for divorce while they are also planning their happy-ever-after.

However, prenups give couples a rock-solid reason to review assets and financial plans, spending habits and budgeting practices. I highly recommend complete financial disclosure and financial counseling for marrying couples.

This dustup provides an opportunity for both of you to assert your dominion over your lives and future.

If your fiancé’s parents are pulling the purse strings tight now, you can assume that they will resort to the nuclear option of disinheritance at other times during your marriage — unless he demonstrates that his parents can’t control him in this way.

I assume your future in-laws are worried that money they would leave to their son might land in the shared marital asset category after their death, but surely they have the ability to plan their estate around this possibility.

Their threat is an attempt to control their son, and how he reacts will affect

their relationship for many years to come.

You must not sign anything because you feel pressured and you should never sign a document like this without having it reviewed by your own lawyer.

Dear Amy:

I know of a family that has a new 16-year-old driver. Our state law says that anyone under the age of 18 must not have any passengers in the car other than a parent or guardian.

The new 16-year-old driver doesn’t care what the law says and always has at least four passengers in the car. Why don’t parents care? Why aren’t parents concerned with the law? How and why would teens follow the law when their parents don’t enforce these rules?

Should I just mind my own business and hope that this child is never in an accident involving a carload of kids?

Sixteen Is Too Young

When my daughter was in high

school, police officers occasionally stationed themselves outside the school gates to monitor the passenger content of exiting cars driven by teenagers.

This very common-sense statute is intended to protect young drivers, their passengers and the rest of us who have to share the road with them.

If you call the parents, they will either be concerned or not; you have nothing to lose by notifying them. The school can also forcefully advocate for compliance.

Now that you are aware of this disregard for the law, you should emphasize to your kids (if you have them) how important it is to comply (as drivers and passengers) with this lifesaving law.

Dear Amy:

“Sick of It Sister” wrote to you that her sister was having roommate problems. I am in college and have friends that work as resident advisers. Their biggest pet peeve is when parents call with

complaints or problems their children are having.

The sister is in college now, and she is expected to start acting like a young adult. This involves fighting her battles instead of letting the parents deal with it.

The sister needs to be the one dealing with the problem directly. The parents should not strongly advocate for her.

Student in the Know

“Sick of It” reported that her sister (and parents) had already taken the matter to RAs, with no result. I suggested it was time for the sister alone to go to the dean, with the parents providing backup, but only if necessary.

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