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Date: February 8, 2012

Music Festival Releases Premier Recording of Giannini Works

MANCHESTER - Writing and performing music may be one thing. Getting it recorded and preserved for posterity is another.

The two don't necessarily go hand in hand. But the absence of a previous recording simply may mean an opportunity that was waiting for the right combination of circumstances.

Such appears the case with the most recent recording effort produced by the Manchester Music Festival, which has just released its most recent compact disc, and fifth overall. The recording consists of two compositions by Vittorio Giannini, an American-born composer of classical music who enjoyed a prolific career as a writer of music in addition to being an influential music teacher. But his work languished on the shelves in relative obscurity until now. The recording by the MMF represents a "global premier" of his work, said Ari Rudiakov, the artistic director of the music festival.

Unrecorded does not mean unperformed, however.

Rudiakov was intrigued by one of Giannini's pieces that he conducted for a string orchestra about 10 years ago. That initial interest led to more research, then the music festival performing the two pieces they subsequently recorded, and then to three days at Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, renowned for its superb acoustics, where, almost exactly one year ago, they nudged Giannini over the edge from unrecorded to recorded, Rudiakov said.

Giannini's composing style resulted in music that was "listenable," he said.

"The classical heavyweights of the day (this would be the late 1920s and 1930s when Giannini composed the two pieces recorded by the MMF chamber music ensemble, one a piano piece accompanied by a quartet of stringed instruments, and the second a piano trio) were more complex to listen to," he said. "This was a neo-Romantic composer squarely swimming against the tide. That's partly why his output pushed him towards obscurity."

The prevailing winds of classical music of that time have come to be known as a "Neoclassical" period, something of a return to the original precepts of order and balance which characterized the genre, in place of the "Romantic" period in music writing which held sway in the latter part of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th. "Romanticism" in musical terms implied unleashed passion and emotion into the music, in contrast to the order and structure preferred by those who came before and after.

While Giannini may not yet be a household name, neither will he now remain quite as obscure. He enjoyed a remarkable career as a performer, composer and perhaps most especially as a music teacher. He taught at the famed Julliard and Manhattan schools of music, where many of his students would go on to prominence. He went on to found the North Carolina School of the Arts. His composing was especially well-received for vocal and operatic music (the MMF's two recordings are both instrumentals).

Not only are Giannini's piano quintet and the piano trio the first recording the music festival chamber ensemble has released in about five years, but it is also their first "studio" setting, where certain sections were recorded and re-recorded as often as necessary to get right. Basically, the musicians are set up on a "stage" more or less as they would be if giving a regular performance - they still have to see each other and get visual and musical cues from their colleagues, Rudiakov said. But making a recording is more like making a movie than a theater play, he said. The artists rely on the sound engineers to validate whether a piece has been squarely captured - if not, it's a re-take, he said.

It took two days to nail down the Giannini pieces, but now that they're finished, Rudiakov would like to have a crack at a few others, he said.

"We (the MMF) are the first to release this, and we are very excited and proud to crack open Giannini's world of chamber music and there's a lot of it," he said. "His music is waiting to be discovered. I hope it (the CD) will have legs and travel."

The musicians performing on the CD include Joana Genova and Stefan Milenkovich on violins, Ariel Rudiakov on viola, Ani Aznavoorian on violoncello and Adam Nieman on piano in the Quintet for piano and strings, and Milenkovich, Aznavoorian and Nieman on the Trio for piano and strings.

Vittorio Giannini's piano quintet and piano trio by the Manchester Music Festival is not yet available as a music download, as from iTunes, but that may be in the offing, Rudiakov said. Meanwhile, it is available at the music festival office and at the Northshire Bookstore - for more information, call 362-1956.