



Encelia Chamber Ensemble at Yucca Valley's Hi-Desert Museum

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On the afternoon of June 4th, the Encelia Chamber Ensemble, founded and directed by Phyllis Moss, performed at the Yucca Valley Hi-Desert Museum. The museum is an ideal venue for chamber music because of its size and acoustics.

The concert started with Museum Director Stefanie Ritter, who opened the concert with a brief welcome. She then performed, on a toy instrument, the theme ("Ode to Joy") from Beethoven's famous Ninth Symphony. It was a fitting way to start an evening of music, to be performed by this fine ensemble of professionals and amateurs.

The musical menu started with the first movement of J. S. Bach's "Solo Violin Sonata No. 1." Flawlessly performed by Debbie Klak-Amador, her sensitivity, flawless intonation and delivery reflected Bach's intentions. Brava!

Viola duets are rare. Phyllis Moss (Encelia director) and Elaine Faulkner Nessola performed four of Bela Bartok's viola duets, which are based on Hungarian and Romanian folk songs. It was a treat to hear these seldom-performed duos. These short pieces of Bela Bartok, an icon of 20th century music, was a fine contrasting interlude between classics and modern.

The challenge of performing the Mendelssohn "String Quartet No. 1" was more than met with Bonnie Schwartz, Shannon Morgan Jenkins, violins, Phyllis Moss, viola, and Jim Lakey, cello. The music is complex, intricate and fast moving. Their dexterity, sensitivity and partnering with each other displayed the true meaning of chamber music. Although the score is long, time passed all too quickly.

After a brief intermission, Shannon Morgan Jenkins and Elaine Faulkner Nessola, accompanied by the full Encelia Ensemble, graced us with J.S. Bach's "Double Violin Concerto in D Minor." This concerto is a standard for concert violinists. These violinists and the Encelia have every reason to be proud of their performance. Focusing on interpretation and sensitivity, both the Encelia Ensemble and the soloists gave us a perfectly balanced, crystalline and satisfying performance.

In the second half of the concert the Encelia Majors were joined by the Encelia Minors, students in the beginning chamber music class offered through the town of Yucca Valley. The class is designed to teach basic technique, music theory and performance skills through playing beautiful music. Playing alongside experienced players is one of the best ways to gain confidence and performance experience.

The combination of all the strings resulted in a big sound that was perfect for the museum concert hall. English folk songs, works by Handel and Henry Purcell and an arrangement of the Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts" were the final offerings that concluded the concert.

Having a first-class performance like this for a small desert community is a rare treat that I know will be repeated with Phyllis Moss at the helm.