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Reviews of performing arts with emphasis on young artists and small opera companies.

W*e are here to encourage the development of gifted young singers and to stimulate the growth of New York City's invaluable chamber opera companies. But we will not neglect the Metropolitan Opera either. Get ready for bouquets and brickbats.*

**Monday, December 9, 2024**

**A MUSICAL POWER COUPLE**



Ahmed Alom and Rosario Armas

We searched our brain for words to describe an artistic partnership that is more than an artistic partnership. When you take an unusually gifted mezzo-soprano and put her onstage with her equally gifted conductor/pianist husband, the musical consequence is more than transporting. We apologize for our clumsy attempt to represent the love and connection between Mexican  **Rosario Armas** and her Cuban husband **Ahmed Alom** by juxtaposing two photos. The two speak the same language as well as the same musical and emotional language.

The occasion for sharing in this love fest was the final concert of **The Washington Square Music Festival**, of which Mr. Alom is the Musical Director. The concert was held at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery and drew a standing room only crowd of music lovers. Beside our favorite musical couple, **The Festival Chamber Orchestra** was on hand, about which more later.

The part of the program that best expressed the mutual affection of this darling couple was a set of songs by **Clara Schumann** who, as is widely known, defied her strict parents to marry the famous Robert Schumann, whose output of art songs was stimulated by his adoration for Clara. We wish that more vocal concerts would include her excellent songs and felt grateful that Ms. Armas gave them the attention they deserve.

The passionate *"Er ist gekommen in stürm und regen"* was followed by Clara's  gentle setting of *"Liebst du um Schönheit"*(also set by Gustav Mahler) and *"Warum willst du and're fragen"*.  Ms. Armas' instrument has both depth and breadth and remained even throughout the entire register. The tone quality was moving in its varied emotional coloration and the *vibrato* was just right for the material.

Mahler was not to be neglected. His *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*rivals Schubert's *Die Winterreise*in its depiction of the agony of lost love. No doubt, Mahler's wife Alma and her constant stream of lovers inspired this painful song cycle. The singer must convey  the many shades of sorrow, disappointment, rage, and failed attempts to rise above it all with an assist from the natural world. This was brilliantly achieved by Ms. Armas with Mr. Alom echoing the feelings every step of the way. We were fighting back tears throughout and hoping that the artists will never ever have to experience such pain!

The final vocal event on the program consisted of a song cycle *Canciones de la Muerte op.20*  by Julián de la Chica, a living composer with whom Ms. Armas has frequently worked. It is quite an honor to participate in an orchestral world premiere and the sonorities captured by the orchestra were various and often pungent. However, we found the death-oriented text by Padre António da Ascençao (translated from Portuguese into Spanish by the composer) to be too solemn, grim, and ponderous for our taste.

Also on the program was Johann Sebastian Bach's*Brandenburg Concerto no. 5* conducted from the piano by Mr. Alom, who achieved a lively and concise reading. For our musical tastes however, we preferred Debussy's *Prelude à l'après midi d'un faune*for its dreamlike exoticism. The introductory flute solo was beautifully handled by flutist Sheryl Henze who was joined by clarinetist Mitchell Kriegler.

It was a lovely well-balanced and varied program. The memories we will take away, however, will be that of the lovely attunement of Ms. Armas and Mr. Alom!

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