

Music Academy Mariposa Series

Soprano Michelle Bradley

- Vini, vidi, vici

Review by Daniel Kepl / VOICE

ART, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY ITS INTERPRETATION, is all about personality. Music Academy alumna, soprano Michelle Bradley, returned to her vocal training grounds last Sunday, dripping in recent kudos and rave reviews from triumphs at the Metropolitan Opera, San Diego Opera, and Chicago Lyric Opera. Presenting the second of three recitals by various artists as part of the new Mariposa Series at the Music Academy, Bradley offered an intimate program with her steady-as-a-rock collaborator, former Music Academy faculty artist, pianist Brian Zeger. A sold-out crowd of more than 100 savvy patrons found themselves in the embrace of two nearly overwhelming phenomena – the Music Academy’s elegant and characterful Lehmann Hall with its chandeliers, turn-of-last-century ceiling molding, and wood floors, and the utterly transparent, pitch-perfect, and disarmingly Kentucky-cheerful gobsmack talent of Michelle Bradley.

2014 grand-prize winner of the Music Academy’s Marilyn Horne Song Competition, Bradley has come a long way since, and she lit up the tiny recital room in the main house with a fascinating program, tempered mindfully against acoustic overload. Wearing a bright red evening gown that added volcanic energy to the proceedings while also melting hearts, Bradley offered a program of Samuel Barber (*Hermit Songs*, Op. 29); three songs by Reynaldo Hahn; four of Mahler’s *Rückert-Lieder*; two elegant arrangements of traditional hymns; and an encore medley of Whitney Houston classics.

Opening her recital with *Hermit Songs* composed by Barber in 1953 and premiered by Leontyne Price, Bradley wasted no time confirming her nuanced capacity for scintillating vocal color, which she has nurtured to maturity since 2014. It was not difficult, because of Bradley’s unabashed personal interpretive temperament, to hear also, a timbre in the mid-low range, or an earnest certainty in declamation reminiscent of Price.

Of the ten songs in the set, *St. Ita’s Vision* and *The Heavenly Banquet* were prime examples of Bradley’s exquisite, clarified vocal color, while the last two, *The Praises of God* and *The Desire for Hermitage*, gave the soprano opportunity to unleash, a generous dollop of her enormous vocal sound.

Three love songs by Venezuelan-born French composer Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947) offered a mid-meal sorbet in quasi-Baroque stylings. À *Chloris (To Chloris – 1913)* fashioned compositionally with a French Overture conceit, provided Bradley with broad swaths of legato phrasing, which she executed with mesmerizing vocal fluidity. *Quand je fus pris au pavillon (When I was lured to her love nest - 1894)* to a dance tune in Baroque manner, found the soprano in lighter, more playful voice as she canted male grievance: “If I had only been a falcon, or had the wings to fly away, I’d have saved myself from her.” Another opportunity for



Photo by Zach Mendez

Soprano Michelle Bradley and Pianist Brian Zeger

sustained phrasing, *Si mes vers avaient des ailes (If my poems had wings – 1888)* composed at the age of 14, ended the set in gentle, post-Romantic manner, to Victor Hugo’s *If only my poems had the wings of the soul*.

Finishing the art song portion of their program, Michelle Bradley and Brian Zeger performed four of Gustav Mahler’s five *Rückert-Lieder* (1901-1902) beginning with *Ich atmet’ einen linden Duft (I breathed a gentle fragrance)* with its sprawling vocal landscape. *Liebst du um Schönheit (If you love for beauty)*, one of the most challenging of the songs technically, found Bradley’s top voice superbly focused and capacious. *Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder (Look not into my songs)* with its difficult intervallic writing, was precisely in pitch, no small feat. The last and most famous of the *Rückert-Lieder*, *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen (Lost am I to the world)* gave Bradley the narrative freedom to reveal her greatest asset, conveying emotional vulnerability.

A gorgeous arrangement by James Miller of the traditional hymn *I Am Seeking for a City* and Margaret Bonds’ discreet arrangement of *He’s Got the Whole World in His Hand* fired up Bradley’s inner gospel, as well as her mighty voice. And to make the evening particularly memorable, sitting down at the piano, Bradley morphed into Vegas mode, a deliciously mesmerizing and delightfully

loose medley of Whitney Houston tunes, after a little warm up doodle – Puccini?

Daniel Kepl has been writing music, theatre, and dance reviews for Santa Barbara publications since he was a teenager. His professional expertise is as an orchestra conductor.

For more reviews by Daniel Kepl visit: www.performingartsreview.net

The Goleta Valley Art Association's 12th Annual
Picassos 4 Peanuts Show ***

**December
6th ~ 28th**


**Goleta Valley
Public Library**

500 N Fairview, Goleta


10% of proceeds will
be donated to Friends
of the Goleta Library

**GVAA members
will sell their
original art for
\$300 or less**

***Original art for
not a lot of money



Picasso's Elf by Adria Abraham



www.thegoletavalleyartassociation.org

Commemorative Tree Plaques... Great Gifts & Great Memories

Designate a tree as a tribute to a family member or friend.

Santa Barbara Beautiful
has funded more than 13,000
street trees in Santa Barbara!
Find out more at www.SBBeautiful.org



For more information visit:

www.sbbeautiful.org/commemorativetrees.html

Santa Barbara Beautiful is a 501 (c) 3. Donations may be tax deductible. TAX ID: 23-7055360