

Review of Tine Thing Helseth's concert December 13, 2009, at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. (posted on the Trumpet Players International Network email listserve) – by Galen R. Tromble

Here's the program – minus 3 piano only pieces (apologies to pianist Steffan Horn, who was superb – but I wrote this for the trumpet players):

Bohuslav Martinů (1890 – 1959) Sonatine for Trumpet and Piano (1956)
Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937) Pièce en form de Habanera (1907)
George Enescu (1881 – 1955) Légende (1906)
Stanley Friedman (b. 1951) From Solus for solo trumpet (1975) No. 4: Fanfare
Edvard Grieg (1843 – 1907) Haugtussa, op. 67 (1895)
Det Syng (It sings)
Veslemøy (Veslemöy)
Blåbær-li (Blueberry Hill)
Møte (Meeting)
Elsk (Love)
Killingdans (Lambs Dance)
Vond Dag (Bad Day)
Ved Gjøtlet-Bekken (At the Gjøtlet Brook)
Manuel de Falla (1876 – 1946) Siete Canciones populares españolas (1914)
El pino moruno (The Moorish Panorama)
Seguidilla murciana (Dance from Murcia)
Asturiana (Memories of Asturia)
Jota (Spanish Dance)
Nana (Nanny)
Canción (Song)
Polo

Might as well get this out of the way right at the start – Tine's trumpet playing is as close to perfect as I could imagine. She played everything on her C trumpet, which I understand is a Yamaha Chicago model. I have no idea what size or kind of mouthpiece she uses, but it must be just right for her. She played most of the concert from memory – at least everything from Legende on to the end.

Her tone has a vocal quality and purity – she warms it up beautifully with vibrato at times. It is about as beautiful a trumpet tone as I can imagine, and is even from low to high, soft to loud. Those who have seen the videos know how relaxed and effortless her playing looks, and you can hear that in her sound. Whether she was playing soft or loud, the sound gave no hint of being constricted or forced.

Her Enesco was the best I've heard. There are a couple of phrases in that piece that I've always found a bit odd – just how they lay and resolve – but she found a way to make them sound just right. She shapes lyrical phrases beautifully, and I noted at one point, can even shape a long tone so it is like a musical phrase. Her technical work in Legende was flawless, and the muted ending was gorgeous.

I had not heard the Stanley Friedman piece – I expect some of you are familiar with it. All I can say is that the sounds coming from her horn were mind boggling to me – I'd love to hear her play it again – or several more times. There were parts that sounded almost like they were electronically processed – but it was all her and the horn.

I sometimes wish I wasn't tuned in to things like fluffy articulations, an intonation problem here or there, or imprecise fingering – because I want to just be able to listen and enjoy the music. Nonetheless, I find myself always aware of the little technical problems that go with the trumpet and bedevil us players. No problem with Tine however – I didn't hear even a hint of a muffed articulation or a note that didn't sound on pitch, or that wasn't full and resonant.

We've probably all heard trumpeters who have great technical skill, and can run down the most challenging piece with ease, but leave us with the feeling that we've heard a great technician, but something was missing musically.

As fantastic as Tine is as a trumpet player, the thing that struck me most was her musicality. She has mastered the instrument – effortless mastery, if you will – and is able to go beyond trumpet playing and express herself musically. Tine is a musician who plays trumpet.

A piano/trumpet recital exposes the trumpeter a lot – you can't cover things up like you might in a recording studio, and there aren't any re-takes. So rest assured, those of you who liked her recordings – she can do it live too.

I'm looking forward to seeing and hearing Tine again, and I hope the rest of you get the chance as well – I think you'll be impressed.