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## MIM SpringFest: Back to its roots yet breaking new ground

By Charles Atthill  
Special to Prospector

MIM's SpringFest returned to its roots at St. Joseph's Cultural Center, where MIM began 30 years ago. But the program was a far cry from the Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, and Barber of 1981. The two concerts broke new ground, with jazz as a link; a jazz-harp recital, and a chamber concert of twentieth-century works, filled with jazz rhythms and influences.

Just when we thought we knew jazz, along comes harpist Motoshi Kosako, bassist Bill Douglass, and drummer Daryl Van Druff to unfold a fascinating new jazz vista.

"We are used to the harp played by a beautiful young lady with long blond hair," said Kosako, "and you get me, a Japanese man."

His program, mainly original compositions, included a Bill Evans-inspired waltz; funky blues; and oriental-tinged pieces featuring Bill Douglass on Chinese bamboo flute, foil to the harp's gentleness. Less gentle were Living River, the harp's subtlety effectively off-set by Van Druff's brushes, and some

"wild stuff" in China Road. Kosako's sensitivity was as evident as his technical skill, including difficult-to-play chromatic scales.

"It ought to be easy," said Douglass. "He's got 51 strings; I've only got four."

A Place in the Heart conjured a magical landscape; Amazing Grace, dedicated to Japanese tsunami-victims, grounded us.

The second concert featured MIM principals, on sparkling form, with Gregory Vajda conducting and playing clarinet, in works by Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Janacek and Martinu.

Stravinsky's 1918 *The Soldier's Tale* alone was worth the admission price. A moral tale (If you have something, don't give it up in the hopes of getting it all: You may end up with nothing), *Soldier* was performed by seven instrumentalists (musicians were scarce in 1918 Europe) and a narrator. Bob Rossman's narration delightfully captured the spirit. His characterizations were engaging: The devil, in disguise, entices the soldier into giving up his violin, his soul, in return



Photo by Chris Wakefield

Janet Sims, viola, and Gregory Vajda, clarinet, played in Music in the Mountain's SpringFest concert on April 17.

for the promise of fortune and the princess. Yes, the soldier loses it all.

The luminous ensemble included Scott Macomber's brilliant trumpet, Scott Ney's virtuosic percussion, Don Benham's circus-like trombone, and a devilish Robin Mayforth for the diabolical violin part. In 1918 Stravinsky, master of rhythmic complexity, had never heard jazz; he had only seen it written. Yet his sound-scape is jazz-like, exotic, and witty. Maestro Vajda wove the strands of the intricate score with relish.

By 1927 when Martinu wrote his jazz ballet *Kitchen Review*, jazz was established. It's a fun romp through dance and jazz forms, vividly played by a

six-instrument ensemble, with Macomber's whining muted trumpet recalling another age, and Brenda Tom's piano spot on. Paul Whiteman anyone?

The opener, Prokofiev's *Overture on Hebrew Themes*, was commissioned by New York Jewish musicians. Who knew MIM musicians had such klezmer inclinations?

Janacek's 1924 four movement wind sextet *Mladi*, "Youth," written when he was 70, is a nostalgic recollection of his childhood and youth. Cheery and bright, *Mladi* looked as much fun to play as to listen to.

*Charles Atthill lives in Alta Sierra. He is practicing his Charleston.*