

On April 26, the 40th Anniversary of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster, The Washington Group Cultural Fund, in collaboration with the Ukrainian Institute of America, presented a commemorative concert at the historic Lyceum in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside Washington, DC.

In her opening remarks, the president of The Washington Group, Laryssa Courtney, recalled the deaths at the power plant and the thousands of cancer cases in the contaminated areas, including childhood thyroid cancer. Chornobyl was the worst nuclear disaster in history. The delay in notifying the population heightened popular distrust in the Soviet government, and the high cost of remediation helped to bankrupt the USSR. Most recently, Russia's drone strike on the Chornobyl containment structure proved that Russia is a nuclear terrorist.

Ms. Courtney observed that despite all the darkness in the world today, there is still beauty such as in nature and music, and that appreciating this beauty brings light and hope, essential to our well-being. Welcoming the four wonderful musicians, she guaranteed they would touch everyone's hearts and lift their spirits.

The concert featured violinist Solomiya Ivakhiv, named one of the "major artists of our time" by Fanfare Magazine, and Director of Music at the Ukrainian Institute of America; pianist Melvin Chen, a highly praised recording, solo and chamber artist, and Director of the Yale Summer School of Music and the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival; Igor Leschishin, principal oboist of the Washington National Opera Orchestra since 1998; and cellist Darrett Adkins, whose performances were called "heroic" and "stunning" by *The*

*New York Times*, and who champions contemporary music with many new concerti dedicated to him.

These outstanding musicians performed stirring works by Ukrainian composers whose lives spanned the last 150 years. The program opened with a new work by Catherine Likhuta (b.1981), *Tangle and Tear for Piano Trio*. Its challenging and aggressive pace demonstrated the musicians' impressive agility. It begins with a plaintive lament and quickly turns into a heated exchange, with each voice building toward a climactic united dissonance that, unexpectedly, brings the powerful dialogue to an abrupt end.

*Dreams and Impromptu for Violin and Piano* by Viktor Kosenko, and *Elegy for Cello and Piano* by Mykola Lysenko, two 19th and early 20th century composers followed. Violinist Solomiya Ivakhiv and pianist Melvin Chen supported each other's playing with great sensitivity in Kosenko's *Dreams*, a beautiful romantic piece, and *Impromptu*, a delightfully fanciful and spirited work.

Cellist Darrett Adkins noted that *Elegy* was originally written for piano solo. But then Lysenko, like other composers at the time, discovered that the cello was also a solo instrument, repurposed this piano piece for cello, and it ultimately became known as a cello solo. Mr. Adkins, supported by Mr. Chen's responsive accompaniment, played this melancholic piece of lyrical music with gorgeous tone and wonderful expressiveness.

Next was heard the Washington premiere of Bohdana Frolyak's (b.1968) *Music for Ann-Gel (Angel)*, the second movement (transcribed for oboe and piano trio) from her *Concerto for Oboe*

*and Orchestra* (2022), which was commissioned by Mr. Leschishin, and premiered by the New York Philharmonic in 2022.

Ms. Ivakhiv related that this movement was dedicated to the composer's sister Hanna (Angel), who died on the fourth day of Russia's full-scale invasion. In this lament, beautifully articulated legato passages with deeply soulful and melancholic notes soared from Mr. Leschishin's oboe, transporting the listener to a heavenly world where angels comforted those who grieved for loved ones. The divine solo oboe theme was repeated throughout this movement, first intertwined with violin, cello, and piano accompaniment, and then echoed by the violin and piano, with the piano's gentle chords and cello's pizzicatos providing subtle rhythmic support.

Myroslav Skoryk's *Carpathian Rhapsody for Violin and Piano* followed. It was also written for violin and orchestra and recorded by Solomiya Ivakhiv, performing with the Ukrainian National Symphony Orchestra. This amusing and lively piece incorporates Ukrainian folk tunes, and Ms. Ivakhiv's spirited rendition, at times accelerating to breakneck speed, displayed passion and joie de vivre.

Cellist Darrett Adkins pointed out that Vasyl Barvinsky, another 20th century Ukrainian composer, wrote the last piece on the program, *Piano Trio in A minor*, when he was just 19 years old. Like Skoryk's Rhapsody, the third movement of this complex and beautiful work includes humor, Ukrainian folk dance themes, and moves with high energy, culminating in a powerful finale. Works by composers such as Skoryk and Barvinsky seem to come naturally to Ms. Ivakhiv, who performed their music effortlessly.

The large and enthusiastic audience gave the performers a standing ovation and was rewarded with an encore, *My Kyiv*, the beloved official city anthem of Kyiv, written by Ukrainian composer Ihor Shamo. A reception to celebrate the artists followed the concert.

The Washington Group is grateful to the Self Reliance Financial FCU for its generous support of the concert, and encourages everyone to become members of this important institution in our community.