

Arkansas Democrat Gazette

March 5, 2010

MUSIC REVIEW

A chamber triumph for dramatic soprano

ERIC E. HARRISON
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

The Chamber Music Society of Little Rock offered up a superb example of vocal chamber music Thursday night at Little Rock's St. Mark's Episcopal Church.

Soprano Sarah Wolfson, with musical partner Lydia Brown at the piano, swept the audience away with a program of "Songs of Innocence and Experience."

Wolfson opened with a packet of songs about or from the point of view of children, including "Der Sandmann" by Robert Schumann and "Love in the Thirties," William Bolcom's bedtime dialogue between an inquisitive kid and his increasingly exasperated father. Particularly cute and charming: "Quelle aventure" by Frances Poulenc, a sort of Seussian, "Mulberry Street" vision of a flea pulling an elephant, and "Evening Prayer" from Modest Mussorgsky's

Nursery Songs, a child asking the Lord for blessings for his entire extended family.

Selections from Hugo Wolf's *Italienisches Leiederbuch* offered a transit of adolescent young-love angst — particularly fun, "Schweig einmal still" (loosely translated, "Just shut up for once, you awful windbag!"), berating a tone-deaf, serenading boyfriend.

And Wolfson closed with a bevy of world-weary, sadder-and-maybe-wiser songs, including a Kurt Weill cycle (biggest hits: the cautionary "Saga of Jenny" from *Lady in the Dark* and a couple of "Mack the Knife"-ish tunes, "Das Lied von der harten Nuss" and "Surabaya Johnny" from *Happy End*) and Bolcom's *Cabaret Tunes* with a Bolcom chaser as an encore.

Wolfson, as good an actress as she is a singer, got her message across in the non-English songs by gestures, postures, body language and attitude.