

# 'To János with Love'

## Friends offer posthumous Valentine concert to beloved music professor

BY LONNIE BURSTEIN HEWITT

János Négyesy was still in the midst of musical projects when he died unexpectedly on Dec. 20, 2013 at age 75. A world-renowned violinist, he had been part of the UC San Diego faculty for 35 years.

Among his many on-campus concerts were his quarterly *Soirées for Music Lovers*, featuring his wife and a changing cast of students and alumni. Feb. 14, his scheduled *Valentine's Day Soirée*, would have been his 80th, instead, the music department presented a tribute, "To János with Love: A Celebration of Life," at Prebys Concert Hall, with performances by two dozen faculty, students and alumni whose lives Négyesy touched. So many volunteered to participate in the memorial concert that some had to be turned away.

Négyesy was a passionate performer of the classical violin repertoire, who was also a champion of new music. Just two weeks before his death, he gave a concert on violin and live electronics, featuring the premiere of a piece written especially for him by Nicolas Vérin, a young French composer at UCSD on a Fullbright grant. It included acoustic and electric violin, a spherical sound sculpture, and videos of some of Négyesy's computer paintings, and was to be Chapter One of a four-part, fully-staged performance project.

Born in Budapest, Négyesy lost his father to the Nazis, took up the violin at age 4, and later managed to outwit the secret police in Soviet-occupied Hungary



Päivikki Nykter and János Négyesy in 2012

CHRIS LEE

and take advantage of an offer to study music in Germany.

In 1970, he became concertmaster of the Radio Berlin Orchestra, under Loren Maazel, and went on to perform with Pierre Boulez and John Cage in Paris. In 1979, he was invited to come to UCSD as a visiting associate professor.

The visit never ended. He stayed on, married a former student (Finnish violinist Päivikki Nykter), and continued performing, recording and teaching up to the end.

"He loved La Jolla," Nykter said. "Even though he had to travel so far to concerts in Europe, he loved the slower pace here, the nice people, and not having to fight the weather. He really felt at home here.

"János was such a do-er, and such a happy person." Nykter, co-produced the

memorial program, which included her playing viola in a Schumann quartet her husband intended to feature in his 80th *Soirée*. "Teaching, coaching, making music — it wasn't work for him; he loved it all. He never thought about retiring. He used to say: 'I don't work, I play,' and he always had a twinkle in his eye ... and he was a wonderful teacher, demanding, but kind."

There was a full house for the Feb. 14 *Soirée*, which opened with a 2008 concert audio of Négyesy playing John Cage's "Freeman Etude XVI."

Cage was a close friend and Négyesy had recorded all 16 Etudes. The two-part program ranged from traditional to contemporary, and included a video of Négyesy and Nykter playing a violin duet by 20th-century Italian composer Franco Donatoni.



Sofia Asasi and Melissa Chu play a piece by Zoltán Kodály, a composer from Négyesy's native Hungary.

"That was from a concert last fall, in Finland," Nykter said. "It was so special, such a magical atmosphere; we kept talking about it. Now I realize: It was the last two-violin recital we would ever play."

Though one of the singers broke into tears in the midst of an aria, the tribute was an upbeat event, concluding with an exuberant raga, a celebration of the life of János, composed for the occasion by Kartik Seshadri, and performed by Seshadri on sitar, Arup Chattopadhyay on tabla, and the evening's co-producer, Mark Dresser, on double bass.

Afterward, there was an outdoor reception with Champagne and some of Négyesy's favorite desserts. "I think János would have liked it," Nykter said. "Love was in the air." ♦



Double bass master Mark Dresser lends his skills to an old Scottish air and a new Indian raga. He co-produced 'To János with Love' with Päivikki Nykter.



János Négyesy, from the video of his last recital with Nykter, is shown at the memorial concert on Feb. 14.



Päivikki Nykter with one of the cakes at the post-concert reception PHOTOS BY MAURICE HEWITT