

the church's organist and music director David A Gell — was moved into a central position in the nave and was being played by Mahlon E. Balderston, triggering the carillon's sonic pageantry. Both Mr. Gell and Mr. Balderston's handiwork as arrangers of hymns was later on

an atmospheric bond and a spatial listening experience for those seated in the center of a given church or theater space. As we were reminded on Sunday afternoon, Trinity Episcopal is blessed with a rich instrument, originally built in 1965 and gradually expanded and

sides of her talent with a Fantasy on "O How Shall I Greet Thee," in which melodies were played in the middle register and on bass pedals, while swirling arpeggios kept the upper range in constant, undulating motion.

Violinist Philip Ficsor, a fine

followed by the organist's own fanciful and stirring toccata based on the tune. It was, in short, a grand and sublime finale, on a grand instrument.

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Then with a now energy

By **JOSEF WOODARD**
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Sometimes, strong musical echoes of the past can come rushing into a contemporary artist's work, and with a gripping power transcending the novelty of the retro revivalist trade. That's a pattern we've seen in town just recently. A few weeks back, there was the triumphant return to town of old soul powerhouse Charles Bradley, whose early '70s-steeped R&B sound was nonetheless fuel-injected with present-day passions by the singer.

A similar phenomena went down at SOhO late on Saturday night, courtesy of the striking sound and vision of '50s era rock-inspired phenom JD McPherson, who effectively blew down the house.

Mr. McPherson, a thirtysomething Oklahoman whose star is rapidly rising this year after the Rounder label reissue of his wondrous album "Signs and Signifiers," packs an assured and sincere punch into his music, regardless of the fact that the music is deeply steeped in the rockabilly and proto rock 'n' roll manners of life before the 1960s.

What matters is that these artists are deeply emotionally invested in the styles they function in, and the styles themselves are firmly etched in the American cultural grain. Certainly, Mr. McPherson knows from whence he sings and writes, and we got a sense of stylistic understanding and studied savvy

from his ace band — with an actual spinet piano and Hammond organ along with upright bass (his creative ally Jimmy Sutton), drums, sax and the leader's own sharp guitar playing.

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As he launched into Chuck Berry's "Delilah," as one of a few encores after midnight, Mr.

McPherson tipped his hat to a hero, while "showing his work," revealing a central influence on the 21st century artist's singing and writing. He also folded James Brown's "I'll Go Crazy" into the set, seamlessly. But where Mr. McPherson's more personal artistry comes into play is on such sturdy original songs as the swampy cool title track, "Signs and Signifiers" and "North Side Gal," the YouTube

video that was essentially the vehicle bumping him up the public profile ladder.

Making music work on a video is one thing, but in the livewire live setting, the singer, though an easy-going and friendly sort in his between-song banter, seizes the spotlight. With a voice both fierce and controlled, he unleashes a strange power, as if possessed by some spirit. If that is the case, said spirit has roots in the early days of rock 'n' roll and hints of next year in the mix.

Fate and time will tell, but this Oklahoman has the goods to go places and influence trends. Lucky for us, we caught him on the way out and up.

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Sounds of the Ancients, Chinese division

By **JOSEF WOODARD**
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Antiquated yet accessible Chinese art and poetry have gracefully made their presence known at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art this autumn, in the stately preserved manifestation of 17th century art and poetry in the show "The Art of the Recluse." Meanwhile, downstairs in the sold-out auditorium last Thursday evening, the cultural spotlight went temporal and real time — but with deep historical roots — in the form of musician Weishan Liu, master of the Chinese zither-like instrument known as the guzheng.

A precursor to the Japanese koto, more widely known in the west, the guzheng is a fascinating instrument made all the more fascinating in Ms. Liu's nimble hands. Based in San Francisco for many years, and joined at SBMA by her gifted student Anna Wong on guzheng, Ms. Liu gave a subtle

and compelling demonstration of her chosen instrumental passion, over two sets of pieces from various Chinese traditions, and from her own compositional work.

Although her performance here was timed in sync with the large exhibition upstairs, for this occasion, slides of select pieces from the show served to accompany her musical art form. Adding depth and understanding to the experience, Bryant Chen served as a master of ceremonies, giving explanations and context between pieces on the program.

Ms. Liu asserts mastery through a nuanced approach to the instrument, coaxing diverse shadings and ornamentations of vibrato, working both sides of the prominent bridge on the instrument. And the immediacy of her musicality works in conjunction with the inherent historical allure of music for an instrument whose very name, guzheng, translates to "ancient zither."

"Evening Song of the Fisherman"

opened the program, in the bright pentatonic scale Americans recognize as kinfolk to country and folk music from this part of the world. Songs with evocative titles, such as "High Mountain and Flowing Stream," "Three Variations of the Plum Blossom" and "Emerging Lotus" matched the emotional character of the music.

Darker emotional colors, in minor mode, came out in the Cantonese Opera piece, "The Lament of the Last Ming Princess." By contrast, relative modernity reared its head on the atmospheric "Polly's Journey," written for a movie version of the book "A Thousand Pieces of Gold," about a Chinese woman who found her way to happiness in Montana in the 19th century.

In designing the concert program, Ms. Liu also made sure to touch on lesser-known regions and cultural traditions in China, closing each half of the show with

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dance pieces from the Yi and Yao tribes, respectively. In the pleasing, concert-ending Yao piece, a melody used by Puccini emerges at first slow and gentle, then turns briskly festive, and a unison part between the two guzheng players delivered a sweeping payoff to a concert that proved to be an enchanting — and educational — encounter.

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