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## Close Encounters celebrates 20th anniversary season and releases disc of music by Jorge Martin

January 29, 2012 at 12:00 am by [Joseph Dalton](#)

By JOSEPH DALTON  
Special to the Times Union

Close Encounters with Music, the chamber series in the Berkshires, is in the midst of its 20th anniversary season and has six more concerts between now and the early summer. The line-up of programs is typically thoughtful and varied with a healthy sampling of mainstream classics from the Romantic era performed by the ensemble members, plus a guest appearance by the fine young Dedaelus Quartet on May 19. There are also several intriguing thematic events, like "Trade Winds: From China with Love" on April 21 and "The Roaring Twenties: Berlin, Paris, New York" on June 2.

Cellist Yehuda Hanani, founder and director of Close Encounters, is the featured artist on a recent disc from Albany Records of music by Vermont composer Jorge Martin. Though the disc isn't billed as a Close Encounters project, four out of the five recorded works were premiered by Hanani or his group since 2003. Taken together, the collection illustrates that a beautiful composer-performer collaboration has been happening in our region for some time now.

In his liner notes, Martin explains that almost all of the music is based on melodic material from songs, mostly of his own writing. That goes along way to explaining the accessible nature and emotional depth of the compositions.

The largest piece was written specifically for the CD. It's a 30-minute long sonata for cello and piano, titled "Four Noble Truths." Martin's title refers to Buddhist teaching, and the music is haunted and soulful in that way that only great cello music can be.

More austere, even fraught, is the cello solo, "Recuerda." The piece was requested by an arts patron and mutual friend of Martin and Hanani after he was given a terminal diagnosis. He wanted something to be performed at his funeral. It's full of drones but also references Schumann.

Quotes from a different time a place appear in "Hollywood Variations," also for cello and piano. The melodic source material is Leonard Rosenman's pastoral theme from his score to "East of Eden." There's enough schmaltz to evoke the film, but plenty of invention and playfulness as well.

Martin's Cuban heritage shows up in the Latin strains of "Ropa Vieja," for cello, accordion and percussion. And coming from an earlier time in Martin's career is Three Nocturnes. It's the most abstract of the offerings, though Hanani infuses it with the same style and feeling that's present throughout the disc. Pianist Walter Ponce likewise brings out fine color and articulation in all of the works.

By the way, Albany Records has also released a recording of Martin's opera "Before Night Falls," which premiered in Fort Worth in 2010. Based on the memoir of the late Cuban writer and dissident Reinaldo Arenas, it's a powerful two-act piece that evokes the culturally stifling reign of Castro as well as how in New York the AIDS epidemic mowed down a generation of gay artists. Orchestra Miami recently announced a semi-staged revival of the opera for this coming October. It's a good choice for an orchestra, since Martin's instrumental writing is a driving force in the fast moving drama.

Joseph Dalton is the author of "Artists & Activists: Making Culture in New York's Capital Region" and a regular contributor to the Times Union. He blogs at:

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