

# A wonderful night with Kashkashian

By Richard Pontzius  
Examiner music critic

**K**IM KASHKASHIAN, whose past appearances at the San Francisco Conservatory's Chamber Music West summer festival have won the charming and attractive violist a tidy following, was back in The City last night, this time as a soloist, courtesy of Pro Musicians. And a welcome return it was, too.

Kashkashian is a tremendously gifted artist, capable of making the music she plays sing one moment, then dance the next. And the magic of it all, is that she does it so simply, so effortlessly and with so much grace.

She draws a huge tone from her instrument and obviously has no intentions of apologizing for being a student of the viola and not of the violin.

And balletujah, she can do more than play. She can program intelligently, as well. Look at this line-up: Robert

Schumann's "Märchenbilder," Henri Vieuxtemps' "Elegie," Max Reger's Suite No. 1, Op. 131d, Maurice Gardner's "Rhapsody," and Manuel de Falla's "Suite Populaire Espagnole" — a handsome blend of the familiar, the not so well-known, and the challenging.

The Schumann was a wonderful opener. It's an airy piece, with plenty of room for its performers to musically stretch out — exactly what Kashkashian and her sensitive accompanist, Robert McDonald, did.

The two of them took the piece on a delightful Sunday drive, bouncing along on old country roads, turning on to smooth highway, then turning off to gaze at the acres and acres of green rolling hills.

Leaving the Schumann, it was down to serious business and hard work. The Vieuxtemps must start quietly, with the viola introducing the lyric main theme while the piano throbs with undulating rhythms. How it grows from there is up to the performers and how much tension they're willing to apply to the composer's arrangement of notes.

As they did in the Maurice Gardner piece, Kashkashian and McDonald took hold of the Vieuxtemps and worked it over until they had control of virtually every element. Here and there some things slipped by, and something happened in the Gardner that caused violist and pianist to drift apart, but the greater part of the time, the two artists knew exactly where they were going and how to handle what they were playing.

Kashkashian's presentation of the unaccompanied Reger Suite, originally written for cello, as I recall, was a formidable achievement, and the Kashkashian-McDonald treatment of the six Spanish pieces in Manuel de Falla's "Espagnole" Suite was enough to make any crowd want to get up and dance. Bravo!



**KIM KASHKASHIAN**  
Making music sing and dance