

The Boston Globe

• WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1995

Music Review

Cellist Doane captures the rapture of love

By Susan Larson
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

STEVEN DOANE, CELLO,
with BARRY SNYDER, PIANO
At: *Sanders Theatre, Sunday afternoon*

CAMBRIDGE – Steven Doane owns the cello, top to bottom. He has played it in orchestras, chamber music ensembles, as a concert virtuoso and as a recording artist. He is a beloved and influential master teacher at the Eastman School of Music. I do not suggest that he is a techno-jock, because he has much bigger fish to fry. It is hard to judge if his bow-arm is flashy or if his forays up the A-string are dazzling, because technical issues never intrude on what the man wants to say; they make it possible.

Doane and his colleague at Eastman, pianist Barry Snyder, offered us the ultimate Valentine Sunday at Sanders Theatre with Beethoven's sublime variations of Mozart's equally sublime duet from "The Magic Flute," "Bei Maennern." These terse pieces contain a seeming infinitude of delicious musical delineations of the state of love, from cloud-walking bliss to cosmic play to Stygian misery. Doane and Snyder spoke with the tongues

of men and angels. In the transcendent E-flat major variation, which can melt the coldest heart, you feel as if you are gazing into the eyes of pure love. I cannot comment on how the duo did; everybody seemed to be seized by bliss.

Doane then led our now-tenderized hearts through the dark, pain-clotted "Suite No. 1 for Solo Cello" by Benjamin Britten. This first of three such suites, inspired by Bach and written for the composer's close friend Mstislav Rostropovich, sings songs of mourning for the wounded of the world, and contains practically everything one might do on a cello as well. Only the satiric, pizzicato Serenata movement lightens the mood. The following Marcia begins in the same whimsical vein with a sort of tin-drum procession of the Little Men in Big Brass Hats, but mutates into wrenching cries.

Doane's playing of the muted plaint over (and under) an open-string drone in "Bordone" and his desperate "Moto Perpetuo" with its expanding windows of calm, came from very deep inside, calling out to those same places in his listeners.

As we were all hoping for something frivolous after intermission, we loved the less-filling but tasty "Pohadka" of Leos Janacek, which enabled us to enjoy pianist Snyder's crystalline touch, rapt attention and elegant rhythmic sense, an important aspect of the afternoon.

Frank Bridge's fine Sonata in D Minor, with its strong formal structure, big tunes and kaleidoscopic harmonics, gave the duo another chance to wail. The high point was Snyder's tear-filled lament opening the second movement, and Doane's transformation of that exhausted theme into a full-throated operatic utterance. Snyder provided a lush undergrowth of shifting chromatic accompaniment. Two charming encores by Bridge and Faure, respectively, sent the audience on its way, with its spirits more harmoniously arranged than before.