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Trio Solisti

Opening a concert with a work as monumental and all-consuming as Brahms's Piano Trio, Op. 87, is risk-taking in the extreme. Playing at the Barns at Wolf Trap on Friday, the **Trio Solisti** (violin, cello and piano) dove into this music's unrelenting passion not only without mishaps but with zealous abandon, poignantly attending to the work's restless dissonances with a knowing grasp of its tightly interwoven counterpoint. At times, zeal gave way to tender lyricism in a transcendent performance.

While traces of central European melodiousness occasionally crop up in the Brahms, they are at the heart of the next work -- Bartok's "Contrasts" for violin, clarinet and piano -- the clarinet part having once been played by Benny Goodman. Offering every possible timbre and more on his clarinet, David Krakauer, who joined violinist Maria Bachmann, cellist Alexis Pia Gerlach and pianist Jon Klibonoff for this piece, pitted Bartok's cleverly urban street sounds against Bachmann's brilliant fiddling style of the onetime Transylvanian countryside, the violin strings unconventionally tuned.

Paul Moravec's "Tempest Fantasy," honored with a Pulitzer Prize in 2004, was the evening's centerpiece. Joined again by Krakauer (sometimes on bass clarinet), the trio lent emotional resonance and rhythmic inevitability to Moravec's torrents of notes.

-- Cecelia Porter

Music fest bows with a flourish

By Rita Moran, Arts writer

May 11, 2006

"Stories in Music," the 12th annual Ventura Music Festival, knows how to catch attention with a gripping first chapter, and an equally compelling second.

Opening concerts Friday at Ventura Missionary Church and Saturday at Community Presbyterian Church, two of the attractive settings for the festival, brought to the tasks superb musicians and a handful of fine actors to flesh out the stories in this year's theme.

Artistic director Nuvi Mehta made a discreet but helpful appearance in the first to illustrate salient features of the works at hand.

Trio Solisti took the stage Friday night and demonstrated why it has garnered praise from all quarters. Violinist Maria Bachmann, cellist Alexis Pia Gerlach and pianist John Kliftonoff began the program with a movement from a piano trio by one of Spain's lesser-known composers, Joaquin Turina, whose work reflects winning characteristics of his country's musical spirit.

Two more works by Turina will appear on tonight's guitar program by Manuel Barrueco at San Buenaventura Mission.

The trio, young but highly experienced, plays with verve and skill that buoys each work it tackles. Members were joined by a master of the clarinet, David Krakauer, who demonstrated through the rest of the program how much his array of instruments, in varying ranges, can add to the depth of arrangements. He and Trio Solisti readily brought out Mussorgsky's whimsy and visual sensibility in "Pictures at an Exhibition."

Saving the best for last, the four instrumentalists charged into Paul Moravec's "Tempest Fantasy," a 2004 Pulitzer Prize-winning piece that evokes the magical spirit of Shakespeare's play through words and music.

Moravec, who chairs Adelphi University's music department, was introduced by Nuvi Mehta and asked to say a few words about his work. He responded amiably, noting that he is the only "living composer" listed in the festival program.

Moravec explained how the words of the play fueled his imagination, with portions of the piece inspired by Prospero, Ariel and Caliban — Prospero with his brooding sense of loss and noble air of calm, Ariel with his quicksilver movement, Caliban with his wild earthiness. A tempestuous storm at sea has tossed the exiled ruler, Prospero, onto a remote island, where he is served by the magical Ariel and has trained a deformed and downtrodden native to do his will.

The stuff of dreams

Moravec has cast the movements in his work to align with words by each character: a light, capricious Ariel, with the violin as the central force; a thoughtful Prospero, represented musically by the pensive cello; and the restless Caliban, aptly suggested in the ruminations of Krakauer's bass clarinet.

Actors delivered the words with captivating verve. The distinguished Peter Strauss, who lives in Ojai, is well-suited to Prospero's philosophical bent, intoning a few of Shakespeare's most famous words as Prospero muses, "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on,"

Young Andrew Fox, a professional intern with Rubicon Theatre Company, provided a burst of energy as Ariel. And Joe Spano, a familiar face from television and the Rubicon stage, jolted the audience to attention with his evocation of Caliban, bursting forth with a torrent of words made all the more gripping because alone of the three, he used no script.

Spano was particularly poignant in portraying Caliban's pain and yearning as he recounted a wonderful dream in which the clouds parted and riches were about to fall about him: "When I waked, I cried to dream again."

Finely tuned

With the first night's excitement still in the air, violinist Cho-Liang Lin and pianist Andre-Michel Schub added to it immeasurably with Saturday's program of works by Mozart, Beethoven and British composer William Walton.

Lin mentioned to the audience at Community Presbyterian Church that the pair programmed Beethoven's Sonata No. 7 in C Minor for the night because it was among the pieces they performed 25 years ago in the first of what has become a continuing series of collaborations.

Lin, a native of Taiwan, and Schub, who was born in France but was brought to the U.S. when he was 8 months old, are a perfectly balanced team, exuding elegance and passion in equal measure. Their command of their instruments and sensitivity to each work and to each other made for a compelling concert.

Beginning with Mozart's Sonata No. 23 in D Major, written by the composer when he was 22 and already well into his career, Schub and Lin captured the piece's buoyant spirit while articulating each challenge with breathtaking technique. Introducing the Beethoven sonata, Lin described it as "almost fierce" and full of abrupt changes in dynamics. Again, the players readily met the demands.

They returned after intermission to another Mozart work, Sonata No. 27 in G Major, written when he was a mature 25 (and more than two-thirds through his 35 years) and living in Vienna. The vigor and joy of the piece continued the evening's glow.

Finally, Walton's Sonata for Violin and Piano, written in 1950 for violinist Yehudi Menuhin, got the Lin-Schub treatment, full of attention to detail and faithfulness to the

work's dramatic substance. The coda, with its molto vivace and presto speeds, made fingers fly and emotion run high as the audience fell under the spell of the work.

The musicians, still serene after the workout, returned to play a softly seductive habanera by Ravel to conclude the evening.

Anyone who missed the concerts — and the subsequent jazz on Sunday, pianist Chu-Fang Huang and narrator Strauss on Tuesday or the Rising Stars in Recital on Wednesday — has missed a lot. But there's still time to recoup, with three more concerts, a Tea and Trumpets session and Sunday's Mother's Day Brunch with music to take in.

— E-mail Rita Moran at ritamoran@earthlink.net.

New York Times

March 8, 2005

Town Hall, New York City

"The performance was consistently brilliant."

"Trio Solisti's incisive account of Ravel's extraordinary Trio in A minor... sounded dangerous and radical."

Washington Post

November 4, 2004

Terrace Theater, The Kennedy Center, Washington D.C.

"Their musicality was marked by a hyperconsciousness of melody and balance, pursued with dramatic muscle and dynamic limberness."

"Their pensive Adagio reflected fine musical craftsmanship, delicate as hand-blown glass."

Palm Beach Daily News

April 14, 2005

Flagler Museum, Palm Beach, FL

"The tension and release [in Ravel's Trio in A Minor] was captured by the trio with spellbinding effect."

"In the Brahms C minor Trio, Bachmann and Gerlach in dialogue with pianist Klibonoff, let their instruments sing with particularly rich tone and lyric expressiveness."

On Trio Solisti's recording of
Pulitzer Prize-winning "Tempest Fantasy"
by Paul Moravec for Arabesque Records:

Palm Beach Post

"An articulate, vibrant performance...
fueled by propulsive energy: at times nervous,
at times noble, always hopeful. Listening to
Fantasy at its most joyous is rather like
watching the luge, at top speed, in an
exhilarating Olympic Games run."

San Francisco Chronicle

"A first-rate premiere recording"

"An exciting revelation"

"The nimble performances by Trio Solisti and
clarinetist David Krakauer bring out Moravec's
combination of tenderness and sprightly wit."

On Trio Solisti's Recording of
Brahms Trios for Marquis Classics:

STRAD MAGAZINE August 2005

Brahms Piano Trios No. 1 in B Major, Op. 8 & No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101 TRIO
SOLISTI- Marquis 74718 13292 www.marquisclassics.com

"Violinist Maria Bachmann, cellist Alexis Pia Gerlach and pianist Jon Klibonoff play this glorious music with rare commitment and insight. Whenever the music turns passionate and physically propulsive they sound in their element, for example in their scorching handling of the finale of op. 8. The tempo injection just before the end is superbly judged and the cataclysmic final bars thrust home to devastating effect. This is a full-blooded reading, opulently recorded with the strings suitably prominent, that makes no apologies for taking this overtly symphonic score out of the chamber room and into the concert hall.

The notoriously tricky Andante grazioso third movement of op. 101 is perfectly handled, giving the music as much warmth and affection as it will take without undermining its air of tantalizing emotional restraint. Once again the free-flowing adrenaline of the finale has one on the edge of one's seat as it might at a first rate concert performance. No less thrilling is the way the players dig deep throughout the first part of the opening Allegro energico, ensuring that even the most high-pressure bow strokes are sounded against cantabile bedrock.

This is to set this highly talented group against the very best the catalogue has to offer. More please!"

- Julian Haylock

Trio Adds Freshness to Brahms

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Thursday, June 16, 2005

Brahms Piano Trios, Opp. 8 & 101. Trio Solisti (Marquis).

"Experts often cite a glut of recordings of canonical works as the reason the classical recording industry is in the dumps. There's just no room for a new album of Chopin waltzes in an aficionado's collection if it's already stocked with Rubinstein or Horowitz. New music also has been stunted by this focus.

Clearly, the balance needs to shift, but today's artists should never completely cease recording the standard repertoire. Occasional new canonical recordings are healthy. Classical music lives in the continuing interpretation, after all.

But listening to Trio Solisti's outstanding new disc of Brahms' Opp. 8 and 101 piano trios, I discovered another reason for polishing up the classics: It promotes the learning of this great music. I've had the Brahms trios sitting around for years but haven't listened to them closely. The standard repertoire, while too limited in scope, is still huge. A new disc gives one reason to get acquainted bit by bit.

While Brahms did revise it later, Op. 8 retains his youthful zeal for the basic elements of harmony. Pianist Jon Klibonoff's weighty attack on the potent reoccurring cadence in the first movement delivers this enthusiasm with an apt exclamation point. Brahms, the famously staid one, was punch-drunk on the music here, and Trio Solisti's fervent playing brings this out.

Written at the other end of his compositional life, Op. 101 is concise and a bit grizzled. The three play it stately but with underlying lyricism and buoyancy; Brahms had plenty of emotion and fire left. Throughout the disc, the ensemble is excellent. Maria Bachmann, violin, and Alexis Pia Gerlach, cello, play with mahogany timbre but not a saccharine richness."

- Post-Gazette classical music critic Andrew Druckenbrod

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle,

June 2005 TRIO SOLISTI: BRAHMS PIANO TRIOS.

"This remarkable trio - violinist Maria Bachmann, cellist Alexis Pia Gerlach and pianist Jon Klibonoff - was founded just four years ago, but it's already a major presence in the classical scene. Composer Paul Moravec wrote his Tempest Fantasy for the group, and the piece went on to win the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for music (thanks in no small part to Solisti's wonderful recording). Now, the ensemble has released a terrific new CD of Brahms piano trios. In the great Trio in B major, they paint a musical portrait of titanic struggle on a vast canvas. The Trio in C minor is full of lyrical urgency."

The Buffalo News

"Brahms, Piano Trio No. 1 in B, Op. 8, Piano Trio No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 101, Trio Solisti (Marquis). The gifted musicians of Trio Solisti strike a variety of "Three's Company" poses in this album, with violinist Maria Baehmann and cellist Alexis Pia Gerlaeh flanking dapper, bespectacled pianist Jon Klibonoff. It's not all cute camaraderie, though. These musicians really bounce off each other, digging deep into this sonorous, stately, utterly heart-melting music. The robust, romantic themes shine, and the thrilling gypsy syncopations, too, as in the finale of the wonderful Trio Op. 101, the lesser-heard of these two beautiful trios. Trio Solisti behave like soloists, each putting his or her own spin on the music. The performances have breathing room and spontaneity."

- Mary Kunz Goldman