

Monday, October 23, 2017

Deconstructing the Piano Quintet with DSO

By Christine Facciolo

“The Piano Quintet – Deconstructed” was the theme for the season-opening concert of the [Delaware Symphony Orchestra](#)’s Chamber Series Tuesday, October 17, in the Gold Ballroom of the Hotel du Pont in Wilmington.

The concert featured an eclectic slate of works by Mozart, Ravel and Brahms as it showcased the talents of some of the most select members of the orchestra’s string section as well as principal pianist Lura Johnson.

It’s always a pleasure to hear musicians of this caliber perform in an intimate setting, and they did not disappoint.

The first half of the concert featured a pair of duos in keeping with the theme of the program.

The concert opened with a performance by violinist Lisa Vaupel and violist Elizabeth Jaffe of Mozart’s String Duo in G major, a work Mozart is said to have ghost-written for Michael Haydn who was having problems filling a contractual obligation to Mozart’s former employer—and arch nemesis—the Archbishop Colloredo.

Vaupel and Jaffe gave a lively reading of this much-performed work, with brisk tempos in the outer movements and much sensitivity in the slow movement.

Violinist David Southorn and cellist Philo Lee tackled one of the 20th century’s masterpieces of the duo genre: the Sonata for Violin and Cello by Maurice Ravel. This work generated lots of intermission discussion among concertgoers who expected something like the sultry and sensuous Bolero rather than this lean and linear work.

Like many of his contemporaries, Ravel searched for new modes of expression and style following the horrors of World War I. And while that drew him to certain aspects of Neoclassicism, he never totally abandoned his use of traditional forms nor did he reject the legacies of his immediate predecessors. Thus, the Sonata for Violin and Cello exhibits the “economy” of late Debussy, the rhythmic drive of Stravinsky and a more contemporary austerity.

Southorn and Lee delivered this demanding work with energy and virtuosic precision, carefully etching and capturing its herky-jerky rhythms and acerbic bi-tonal clashes.

The string players assembled onstage—accompanied by pianist Johnson—after intermission for a performance of Brahms’ Piano Quintet in F minor. This is a large-scale work, dark and dramatic and the ensemble conveyed that Romantic intensity in the outer movements and the relentless third-movement Scherzo, and gave a soulful reading of the Andante.

Yet as heated as the music got, it never lost its transparency. Contrapuntal lines played off against each other without conflict and the several fugato passages were particularly successful. Johnson for her part fit seamlessly into the mix, using the percussive power of her instrument to support rather than dominate. And the felicitous turns in Jaffe’s viola and Lee’s cello were never buried. Still, the ensemble produced a solid, powerful sound.

See www.delawaresymphony.org.

Posted by [Michelle Kramer-Fitzgerald](#)