

Review

Daniel Shapiro with Jinjoo Cho & Matthew Allen in Mixon Hall at CIM (February 1)

by Robert Rollin



Last Friday evening Cleveland Institute faculty pianist Daniel Shapiro presented an exemplary and varied Mixon Hall piano recital assisted by two talented student artist string players. About a decade ago I enjoyed hearing him perform a Beethoven Sonatas lecture recital when he visited us at Youngstown State's Dana School. He demonstrated his layered foreground, middle ground, and background dynamic levels, playing Beethoven with a clarity and expression reminiscent of Sviatoslav Richter's great Beethoven recordings. This three-tiered dynamic approach seemed particularly present in his wonderful first-half Bach and Brahms solo performances.

Shapiro played Bach's *French Suite No 5 in G Major*, BWV 816, a delightful Baroque dance collection, beautifully. The stately *Allemande*'s tempo was steady, yet flexible, enhancing the intricate mix of chromatic linear and harmonic treatment. The spritely *Courante* was nicely shaped, as Shapiro varied the repetitions with ornaments and dynamic changes. The movement's second binary portion sparkled with many chromatic harmonies followed immediately by a closing Picardy third. The slow, soulful *Sarabande* was stunningly expressive, mixing stepwise and surprisingly angular melodic skips. The mood was that of a gorgeous Bach Cantata *arioso*, and Shapiro negotiated the tempo nuances tastefully. Shapiro continued to vary the repeats in both *Gavotte* and *Bourée*, and gave the whimsical and graceful *Loure*, a tasteful and imaginative performance. The closing fugal *Gigue*, replete with surging rhythms, was intense, yet graceful and expressive.

The *Klavierstücke, op. 119*, are among Brahms's finest piano pieces. Shapiro played the B minor *Intermezzo* more slowly than most, but lingered appropriately on the exquisite descending third patterns that look ahead to French Impressionism, and enjoyed the sensuous dissonances as they unfurled. His simple, elegant performance did justice to Brahms's ingenious writing.

The E minor *Intermezzo*'s agitated mood unfolded in a surprisingly rapid tempo that made a great contrast to the previous piece. The soft middle section, *Andantino grazioso*, in the parallel major mode, unfolded sweetly and tenderly, ultimately slowing before the intense

agitated return. The pulsating *Agitato* theme is one of Brahms piano music's great moments.

The C Major *Intermezzo* has an almost orchestral character. Brahms places the main melody in the middle voice, as the three- to four-voice harmony supports from above. Shapiro brought the line out clearly enough, without overdoing things, and played the piece with elegant elan.

The *Rhapsodie in E-flat Major*, yet another masterpiece, begins with a martial air, but continuously changes to arpeggiated sixteenth notes and to more gracefully flowing textures. Shapiro really understood the piece's varied qualities, and made the final returning martial theme especially powerful.

The second half of the concert centered on Slavic music. Dvorak's *Piano Trio No. 4 in E Minor, op. 90*, "Dumky," enabled Shapiro to play with two talented student artists: violinist Jinjoo Cho and cellist Matthew Allen. Both student artists have already had distinguished careers, and their sensitive performance and excellent ensemble, helped make the Trio a special treat. The mercurial changes of happy to sad and back helped engender the piece's frenetic character, and showed off the three musicians' ensemble talents.

Shapiro also played Tchaikovsky's *Dumka, op. 59*, expressively. The title refers to a Slavic ballad, poem, or meditation generally describing heroic deeds. The mood here was also changeable, though not as extensively so as in the Dvorak trio. Though the second half music was not in a league with the first, it, notwithstanding, created a fine contrast and a lively conclusion.

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