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Review

ChamberFest Cleveland: *A Tempo* at Harkness Chapel (June 28)

by Mike Telin

Although the 2013 ChamberFest Cleveland theme is [*It's] About Time*, a secondary theme could easily be *Variety is the Spice of Life*. On Friday, June 28 at Harkness Chapel the superb ChamberFest musicians presented a thoroughly engaging program full of musical variety from start to finish titled *A Tempo*.

The technically commanding and musically sensitive cellist Robert deMaine began the evening with a high energy performance of Alberto Ginastera's *Pampeana No. 2, Rhapsody for cello and piano*. The brief work depicting the Argentine pampas or treeless plains gave deMaine ample room to demonstrate his soulful side as well as his virtuosic prowess. Pianist Matan Porat was a keen collaborator, performing with rhythmic precision.

Porat, together with violinist Yehonatan Berick and cellist Julie Albers, were of one musical mind during their captivating performance of Ravel's *Trio in A minor*. Composed in 1914 and premiered the following year, Ravel's masterpiece can often prove problematic with regard to balances between the players. Luckily this was not the case during this performance as Berick, Albers and Porat created well-blended silken tones and by the work's conclusion one was left mesmerized by its sheer beauty.

Clarinetist Franklin Cohen and pianist Orion Weiss shifted musical moods completely as they opened the second half of the program with a hyped-up reading of George Gershwin's *Three Preludes* arranged by James Cohn. Throughout, Cohen's playing could have easily rivaled that of any jazz clarinetist; his glissandos, accented syncopations and body language were simply remarkable.

Why aren't there more performances of Messiaen's *Theme and Variations for violin and piano*? Perhaps

because not every violinist has the physical and technical control as well as the musical sensibilities necessary to pull off the piece as well as violinist Noah Bendix-Balgley. One of the composer's earliest works dating from 1932, the piece is more than a foreshadowing of things to come from Messiaen, it is a true gem. Bendix-Balgley's and Matan Porat's performance was hauntingly beautiful, balances perfect, and intonation exquisite.

A fiery performance of Schumann's *Quartet in E-flat major* for violin, viola, cello and piano Op. 47, brought this incredibly diverse program to a rousing conclusion. Pianist Weiss and cellist deMaine, joined by ChamberFest colleagues violinist Diana Cohen and violist Dimitri Murrath, performed as though they were an ensemble that has played together over a long period, matching each other's articulations admirably. The whirling *Scherzo* zoomed by with rhythmic accuracy and the work's concluding *Vivace*, played with vigorous intensity, drew a well deserved, immediate ovation from the capacity audience.

Happily, this was a program that worked even better in real life than on paper, and one that was surely a highlight of ChamberFest Cleveland's second season.

Photos by Gary Adams.

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