

ChamberFest Concert 7: *Love Triangle* at Mixon Hall (June 26)

by Daniel Hautzinger



Johannes Brahms. All three being heart-on-their-sleeve Romantic composers, and with Robert's letter in mind, it makes sense to explore this "Love Triangle" through their music.

On June 26 in the Cleveland Institute of Music's Mixon Hall, ChamberFest did just that in a sold-out concert, presenting a work by each of the three with intermingled readings from their letters by ChamberFest Speaker Patrick Castillo (the above quote comes from those).

In keeping with the theme of love, the program began with *Three Romances* for Violin and Piano, op. 22 by Clara Schumann. Amy Schwartz Moretti's violin was slightly overwhelmed by Roman Rabinovich's piano in these sweet trifles. Yet the third was still lovely: after an attractive harmonic shift, the singing melody of the first section in this three-part piece returned over the same accompaniment, now delightfully crisp rather than sweeping.

"I would write to you only by means of music," said Robert Schumann in a letter to his wife, the composer and pianist Clara Schumann. Theirs is a storied coupling, beginning against the wishes of Clara's father, ending with Robert's mental breakdown and early death, and complicated by their close relationships with



Like wife, like husband: the most distinctive of Robert Schumann's *Märchenerzählungen* ("Fairy Tales") for Clarinet, Viola and Piano, op. 132 was also the third. Franklin Cohen, clarinet, Yura Lee, viola, and Orion Weiss, piano, evoked blissful tranquility with their seamless blend. In the ominous second piece, Lee broadened and narrowed her sound to great effect. The blustery fourth allowed Cohen to show a variety of tone, ranging from martial to mellifluous.

Then came Brahms, the unlucky outsider, never entering into a full relationship with Clara despite their mutual love. His epic *Piano Quintet in f, op. 34* reflects his unfortunate position, intense where the preceding works by the Schumanns were relatively light. With their magnificent performance, Weiss, violinists Noah Bendix-Balgley and Diana Cohen, violist Dimitri Murrath, and cellist Robert deMaine positioned Brahms at the peak of this ChamberFest love triangle.



The quintet is an excellent showcase for talented chamber musicians, with passionate solos, rich and varied duos and trios, and intricate counterpoint in which each line is worthy of attention. Weiss and his fellow performers rose to the occasion. Combinations

of parts were deep-toned and precise, and the counterpoint flowed together into an organic whole, no line buried or neglected.

Choosing highlights is futile, for the piece engrossingly carries you forward through ingenious development so that no one section can be excerpted. Brahms, aided here by the performers, managed to create something glorious from insignificant material: the second movement's main melody is little more than a two-note gesture repeated on different pitches, yet here the players transformed it into an exquisite song of devotion. But such a peaceful mood cannot last for Brahms, and the piece ends in hopeless desperation. Such are the woes of a love triangle.

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