

Kent/Blossom Festival's last faculty concert of the season (July 29)

by Carlyn Kessler



On Wednesday, July 29, [Kent/Blossom Music Festival](#) welcomed audience members into Kent State University's Ludwig Recital Hall to cool down with the final Faculty Concert Series program of the season. The evening of chamber music featured celebrated musicians performing works with refreshing, unusual instrumentations.

The concert opened with Mozart's *Trio in E-flat*, K. 498 "Kegelstatt" in the hands of pianist Elizabeth DeMio, Cleveland Orchestra clarinetist Robert Woolfrey, and TCO assistant principal viola Stanley Konopka. "Kegelstatt" is German for the location where one would play "skittles," a lawn game similar to bowling that was popular in Mozart's era. This meaning may have escaped some audience members, as there were no program notes, but such a balmy summer evening would have been perfect for the game.

The group's portrayal of the piece was positively delightful. Ludwig Recital Hall fosters a thick, reverberant sound, which can pose an acoustical challenge to musicians' articulation. All three performers, however, were unhindered. They sang the long lines of the opening "Andante" with warmth, impressively extending each phrase forward. DeMio punctuated the buoyant "Menuetto" perfectly and was sensitive in allowing Konopka and Woolfrey to shine through.

In the last movement, "Rondeaux: Allegretto," the trio's musical conversations charmed. DeMio quickly and charismatically switched from vibrant strings of running notes to vocal melodies, and Konopka's tender, expressive vibrato blended flawlessly with Woolfrey's pure tone to create an immeasurably warm body of sound.

After the *Trio*, DeMio offered heartfelt words, explaining that she had stepped in a week earlier for pianist Joela Jones, who was unable to play due to an injury. On behalf of the group, DeMio said, “We want to offer this concert as our get well card to Joela.” She called Jones “a big inspiration. I grew up watching her and listening to her play.”

TCO first assistant principal cello Richard Weiss joined Woolfrey and DeMio for Brahms’s *Trio for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano*. Surprisingly, Weiss sat where the violinist would in a standard piano trio. The reason soon became clear: the cello part, so dominated by the instrument’s upper register, is reminiscent of a violin part. Weiss expertly demonstrated the work’s sweeping, stormy melodies with grace and ease. The lush, heart-rending passages between Weiss and Woolfrey were almost operatic, particularly during their running arpeggios.

In the second movement, DeMio and Woolfrey created a dense blanket of sound underneath the cello line. This was sharply contrasted by the third movement, its strummed, *pizzicato* cello chords moving into a waltz. The last movement, “Allegro,” is alternately turbulent and sweet. Typical of Brahms’s finales, the movement races to the finish line with fiery, densely packed cross-rhythms. DeMio’s resilient foundation provided the glue for a fervent ending, the group capping off the performance with passion and gusto.

Weiss and DeMio returned to the stage after intermission, performing two showpieces for cello and piano by Spanish composer Gaspar Cassadó. The duo began with *Requiebros*, Spanish for “compliments” or “flirtatious remarks.” With their impassioned sound and Weiss’s fiery vibrato, the pair enthusiastically captured Cassadó’s Spanish flair.

Next was *Danse du Diable Vert*, or “Dance of the Green Devil.” Devilish indeed, this piece is the epitome of spirited virtuosity. DeMio established the tongue-in-cheek nature of the work with her clever, bouncing line in the opening. The cello part is noticeably distinct, oscillating between lush, romantic melodies, humorous and even sarcastic passages, and sprightly displays of technique, most notably the challenging double stops at the work’s conclusion. (Cassadó was a famed cellist himself.) Weiss has the unique ability to execute such technical demands with showmanship while appearing completely composed, even serene. When the duo stood up to receive their applause, DeMio clapped towards Weiss, acknowledging his impressive performance.

Diana Sundet, Kent State oboe professor and co-artistic director of Kent/Blossom, joined Konopka and DeMio for the evening’s closer, German-American composer Charles Loeffler’s *Two Rhapsodies for oboe, viola and piano*. The group breathed life into the fairytale-like first rhapsody, entitled “L’Étang” (The Pond), conjuring diverse images of the water. DeMio’s turbulent line evoked ripples and blustering waves.

The second rhapsody, “La Cornemuse” (The Bagpipe), turned any stereotype about its namesake on its head, taking the audience on an emotionally varied journey that included whimsical bursts of thought as well as lush, romantic melodies. The bagpipe is imitated in the work by thick drones from the viola, emerging from underneath a playful, cadenza-like oboe line. Sundet positively shined, and DeMio was stirring in perhaps the most emotional writing for piano on the program. Defying easy categorization, the Loeffler was a gratifying ending to an enchantingly outside-the-box program.

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