

Pompa-Baldi & Friscioni open Tri-C Classical Piano Series

by Daniel Hathaway



The annual quartet of free concerts presented on the Tri-C Classical Piano Series usually happens at the Cleveland Museum of Art, taking profit of the crowds that show up early on Sunday afternoons to entice museumgoers to make a detour into Gartner Auditorium during their visit.

Although the Museum had just opened again earlier in the week, in-person concerts were not on the agenda. Instead, Classical Piano Series director

Emanuela Friscioni and her husband Antonio Pompa-Baldi invited a virtual audience into their handsome, sun-dappled music room for an intimate, exquisitely-played program of four-hand piano works by Schubert and Debussy topped off with the premiere of a new work by their fellow Italian, Luca Moscardi.

The one-hour program, including brief remarks by both pianists, worked beautifully in its online format. Multiple cameras, cleverly concealed, focused in on the performers from various angles. An iPad replaced the customary page turner.

Four-hand piano music is a domestic animal, meant largely to benefit the players as well as whatever onlookers happen to be around. Hearing these pianists play *a casa* was a special experience the likes of which rarely happens in a concert hall.

With Pompa-Baldi on *primo* (treble end of the keyboard) and Friscioni on *secondo* (bass end), the duo led off with Schubert's wonderful *Fantasia in f*, a piece that deliciously trades off minor and major versions of themes and makes excursions into contrasting music, always stopping in mid-phrase to return once again to the opening material.

The two pianists were perfectly matched technically, played from a single mind, and their phrasing and articulation were crisp and pristine.

Trading ends of the keyboard, Friscioni and Pompa-Baldi made a charming musical excursion out of the four movements — En Bateau, Cortgége, Menuet, and Ballet — of Debussy's *Petite Suite*. Written for amateurs, the piece takes on a special sheen in the hands of professionals, and couldn't have been more charmingly performed by these four hands.

Those who find premieres scary (or unlikely to lead to second performances) would surely delight in Moscardi's *Suite*, Op. 13. Completely accessible on first hearing, the piece might be just a few minutes too long in some of its four movements, yet Ricordi d'infanzia, Siciliana, Berceuse, and Tarantella are fresh-sounding while still falling on the ear like familiar friends. Pompa-Baldi and Friscioni gave Moscardi's often pop-influenced music a bright, engaging reading, ending with his brilliant Tarantella. Watch the video of their performance of the Suite [here](#).

Forthcoming recitals, all online, will be recorded by Aaron Diehl (February 21), Caroline Oltmanns (March 21), and Dan Tepfer (April 18).

Published on ClevelandClassical.com January 26, 2021

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