

Preview

Brahms-Fest III at Trinity Cathedral (October 24)

by J.D. Goddard



The Brownbag Concert Series at Trinity Cathedral has been a weekly tradition in the city of Cleveland for 35 years. Trinity's director of music and worship Todd Wilson has continued this tradition every Wednesday during the season at 12:10 pm when an always appreciative audience comes to enjoy a one-hour program of musical offerings ranging from the classical to the contemporary — and to grab a quick lunch. This past Wednesday, October 24, members of the Trinity Cathedral Choir and Chamber Singers joined Wilson

and guest pianist Elizabeth DeMio in the third and final weekly installment of Brahms-Fest 2012 featuring Brahms's *Hungarian Dances* Nos. 1, 3, 5, 11, and 21 for piano four-hands along with the *Liebeslieder Waltzes*, *Op. 52* for piano four-hands and singers.

Brahms's *Hungarian Dances* are a set of 21 spirited dance melodies based primarily on Hungarian themes and completed in 1869. Each dance varies in length from one minute to four minutes. Brahms originally wrote his Hungarian Dances for piano four-hands and later arranged the first ten dances for solo piano. Only numbers 11, 14 and 16 are entirely original compositions and he later orchestrated numbers 1, 3, and 10. Dvořák, along with other composers, orchestrated the remaining dances.

As they deftly traversed the keyboard, Wilson and DeMio skillfully performed as one. Their interpretive skills and phrasing were inspiring to hear. They produced an exciting performance filled with lush romanticism. Their aural and visual attentiveness was exacting and they filled each phrase with the necessary rubatos, rallentandos and ritards characteristic of Brahms's style.

After a brief intermission, the audience welcomed pianists Wilson and DeMio and nine singers to the stage, who circled the piano for Brahms's 18 *Liebeslieder* (“*Love Song*”) *Waltzes* composed on texts by the German poet and philosopher Georg Friederich Daumer (1800-1875). This collection of “translations and imitations of folk poetry” was written as a tribute to “Waltz King” Johann Strauss, whom Brahms greatly admired.

Basses (Ray Liddle and José Gotera) laid down a good foundation on which the tenors (Mark Bitikofer and Jake Sonnenberg), altos (Beth Cooper and Tracy Coward) and sopranos (Elizabeth Lenti, Sean Ricketts and Erin Smith) could securely navigate their vocal lines with wonderful, romantic abandonment. The balance was a bit challenging because there were only two altos to balance three very strong sopranos. The blurring acoustics of

Trinity Cathedral often hampered diction, however this performance was exceptional for its attention to style and to the shaping of phrases for romantic nuance and drama. Wilson and DeMio were a joy to hear and watch. The chorus was vocally strong and abundantly talented. They sang with just the right amount of vibrato and bravura throughout.

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