

Review

Tri-C Classical Piano Series: Nina Schumann & Luis Magalhães at the Cleveland Museum of Art (January 26)

by Mike Telin



Though South African-born Nina Schumann and Portuguese-born Luis Magalhães fell in love "at first sight" when they met as graduate students at North Texas State University, their assigned performance of a duo piano work resulted in "a total disaster" and they vowed never to play together again.

Good thing they thought better of that decision. During their two-piano concert on the Tri-C Classical Piano Series at the Cleveland Museum of Art on January 26 the South African-based duo played music by Bach, Barber and Adams like one musical mind connected to four hands.

Facing each other, the couple (who perform under the name Two Pianists) began their program with Josef Rheinberger's two-piano version of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. The arrangement was made by the Lichtenstein composer in 1883 for "domestic music-making" and was revised a bit later by Max Reger. At first, the effect of the piece is jarring because of all the Romantic-era additions like octave doublings, accompanimental layers and extra chord tones, but when you succumb to its own 19th century sensibilities, you can sit back and enjoy the piece on its own terms.

The two pianists closely matched each other's colors and articulation, beautifully alternating phrases in the opening and closing *Aria* and playing movements like the fugue of the French overture with blazing speed and perfect ensemble. Passagework was precise and flawless throughout. Only the Quodlibet, which is meant to humorously combine two folk tunes, suffered from heavy Romantic treatment — but that's Rheinberger's fault.

Written in 1951 for piano four hands, Samuel Barber's suite, *Souvenirs*, was later arranged for two pianos by the duo piano team Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale. Each of its six movements is a dance reminiscent of the composer's childhood years in New York.

As they did in the Bach, the two pianists performed this light-hearted work as if from a single musical mind: four hands attached to one body. The opening *Waltz* was full of playfulness, the tuneful *Scottische* full of humor. A soulful and sensitive *Pas de deux* was

followed by a jovial *Two-step*. Schumann and Magalhães's heartfelt and emotional performance of *Hesitation Tango* was followed by a spirited concluding *Galop*.

A work in three untitled movements, John Adams's *Hallelujah Junction* (1996) takes its name from the intersection of two highways — US 395 and Alternate US 40 — near the California-Nevada border. As one might expect, Adams's work is full of rhythmic and more importantly delayed repetitions that ricochet between the two pianos.

Lasting roughly 15 minutes, *Hallelujah Junction* is a mesmerizing account of reckless abandon, which Schumann and Magalhães handled with aplomb. No sweaty brows were evident. What a treat it was to hear this accomplished team deliver such a polished performance. The performers acknowledged the enthusiastic audience ovation with a beautiful version of the third movement from Rachmaninoff's *2nd Suite, op. 17*.

Hats off to Emanuela Friscioni of the Tri-C Classical Piano Series for once again bringing such distinguished artists to Cleveland.

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