

Oberlin Chamber Music Intensive & Festival ends with Oberlin Trio & friends in Warner Concert Hall (Jan. 24)

by Daniel Hathaway



The Oberlin Trio, Oberlin Conservatory's excellent faculty piano trio, brought three busy weeks of chamber music coachings and performances to a rousing conclusion on Saturday evening in Warner Concert Hall.

A large crowd responded enthusiastically to a program of music by Beethoven, Ravel and Robert Schumann played by pianist Haewon Song, violinist

David Bowlin, and cellist Amir Eldan, joined by faculty colleagues Robert Shannon, piano, Marilyn McDonald, violin, and Michael Strauss, viola.

Although the 1795 *Trio in E-flat* is listed as his opus 1, no. 1, the 25-year-old Beethoven was already a skilled composer, as well as a hotshot pianist. His early piano trios give the keyboard player a real workout. And though the string parts sometimes sound like afterthoughts, the E-flat work is studded with impish themes, woozy harmonic episodes and surprising lurches into remote keys. Playing with apparent abandon but perfect control, the Oberlin Trio brought the piece to dazzling life.

Conceived as a ballet, Maurice Ravel's *La Valse* is most frequently heard in its brilliant orchestral version, but there are also arrangements by the composer for solo piano and two pianos. Haewon Song and Robert Shannon put their four hands together for the latter version on Saturday evening, bringing a wide palette of colors to their radiant, beautifully-coordinated performance.



In lesser hands — and there have been many — Robert Schumann’s *Piano Quintet in E-flat* can challenge the patience of an audience. The opening theme alone can become annoyingly persistent after several of its many repetitions. On Saturday, The Oberlin Trio plus Marilyn McDonald and Michael Strauss restored the piece to its rightful status as a masterpiece of the chamber music repertoire with a performance rich in detail and nuance.

The opening movement was brisk, light and malleable, the funeral march moved along at a good clip, the scales and parallel thirds in the Scherzo were tossed off with vivacity, and the highly inflected fugal entries in the finale gave the work an ebullient *gravitas*. A fine ending to a three-week feast of chamber music.



Photos by Walter Novak.

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