

ChamberFest Cleveland: Alexi Kenney at the Cleveland Public Library (June 20)

By Mike Telin



Still in his early twenties, violinist [Alexi Kenney](#) has already amassed an impressive résumé. In 2013 he won the Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition at the age of nineteen, and he was the recipient of top prizes at the Yehudi Menuhin International Competition, the Mondavi Center Competition, and the 2013 Kronberg Academy master classes.

On Saturday afternoon, June 20 at the Main Branch of the Cleveland Public Library, Kenney, who is this season's ChamberFest Cleveland Young Artist, demonstrated exactly why he is deserving of these and many other accolades, during a recital that

featured the music of Westhoff, Schubert, and Strauss.

With its pleasant acoustics, the library's third floor lobby is an enjoyable place to hear music, and its intimate seating arrangement allows listeners to be in close proximity to the performers. The marble walls and open staircases also cause the music to reverberate throughout the building. That often entices unsuspecting library users to stop by and check out what is happening — and then decide whether to stay or not. At the start of Kenney's program the seats were half-filled, but midway through, all were occupied and listeners unable to find chairs seated themselves on the staircase that leads to the fourth floor. This was a testament to the violinist's powerful musical magnetism: the audience knew they were witnessing something special. It would be unfair to say that someday Kenney will be a superstar. He already is.

In an [interview](#) with this publication, the Palo Alto, California native said that he would open his program with the *Solo Suite* by Johann Paul von Westhoff “because I like his music and it deserves to be played.” And he’s right: the work is a beautiful dance suite that precedes the unaccompanied suites of Bach, and is arranged in the standard late Baroque order. Kenney’s amazing bow arm was in evidence from the beginning of the folksy “Allemande.” He tossed off the “Courante” with aplomb. His phrasing during the slow “Sarabande” was beautiful, and the concluding “Gigue” was fast, furious — and effortless.

Pianist Roman Rabinovich joined Kenney for a spectacular performance of Schubert’s *Sonata in A major*, known as the “Grand Duo.” Throughout its four movements, the performers played with a single musical mind, perfectly matching each other’s phrasing and articulations. The second movement, “Scherzo,” and fourth movement, “Allegro vivace,” were particularly impressive.



Richard Strauss’s *Violin Sonata* is a hugely virtuosic work (think *Heldenleben* for two players). Structured in three movements and lasting nearly thirty minutes, it is technically demanding for both the violinist and pianist. Luckily, Kenney and pianist Orion Weiss were up to the task, and they delivered a muscular, technically secure, and musically astute performance. Throughout the piece’s long extended phrases, Kenney’s pitch was spot on, and his tone was consistently full-bodied. He played the slow middle movement, “Improvisation: Andante cantabile,” with romantic splendor, and Orion Weiss brilliantly tossed off the introduction to the exuberant “Finale.”

In the words of Hans Christian Andersen, “Where words fail, music speaks.” This was a performance where music spoke.

Photos by Gary Adams.

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