

**Andrew Sords & Elizabeth DeMio  
at St. John's, Youngstown (Oct. 9)**

by Robert Rollin



On Sunday afternoon, October 9, Youngstown's St. John's Episcopal Church played host to violinist Andrew Sords and pianist Elizabeth DeMio for an excellent recital of 19th- and 20th-century music. The two major works of the afternoon were Johannes Brahms's *Sonata No. 3 in d*, Op. 108, and César Franck's *Sonata in A*. Both received outstanding performances.

The opening Allegro in Brahms's Third Sonata is expressive yet intense, and the duo performed it with restrained energy. DeMio countered Sords' opening, *sotto voce* melody with her own soft syncopations before segueing to her more lyrical second-theme solo. The lyrical Adagio began without pause, and Sords soon played a gorgeous and passionate climax of dolce thirds. A final subdued passage brought the movement to a gentle conclusion.

In the third-movement scherzo, DeMio presented a chromatic descending theme backed by double stops from Sords, who later moved into powerful arpeggios and multiple stops. Complex harmony and modulations led back to an expanded restatement with a final pianissimo close. The concluding Presto agitato, a virtuosic *tarantella*, included lively exchanges between the two soloists and powerful rhythmic contrasts, all brought out with panache. This was truly a beautiful performance.

On the wedding day of 31-year-old virtuoso violinist and composer Eugène Ysaÿe, César Franck presented him with a gift: his *Sonata in A*. Ysaÿe performed it immediately with pianist Léontine Bordes-Pène, an invited guest. Ysaÿe championed the work, performing it frequently for the rest of his life.

DeMio captured the opening's haunting pattern, and Sords followed with the sweet, rocking motion of the main theme. Sords respected Franck's opening marking, *molto dolce*, playing with great lyric beauty. DeMio accompanied with sensitive grace. In the

scherzo-like second movement, the duo played energetically, negotiating its many turbulent rhythmic changes with poise and élan.

The third-movement piano opening brought Wagner's *Tristan* Prelude to mind. Sords' engaging, improvisatory solo in the *Recitativo* yielded to the duo's more pressing interactions in the *Fantasia*, reprising the second movement's growling energy. The finale returns to the first movement's undulating motion, the violin echoing each measure in the piano. The last recurrence of the opening theme was especially elegant.

The concert opened with a lyrical and attractive performance of Edward Elgar's wistful *Salut d'Amour*, an engagement gift to his future bride. *Tzigane*, Maurice Ravel's famous tribute to Hungarian gypsy music, is a veritable compendium of demanding violin techniques, including multiple stops, high harmonics used as melody, rapid octave passages, and left-hand pizzicato. Sords tossed off the piece with amazing ease, and DeMio negotiated the challenging piano part with a wonderful sense of ensemble. No one could have played the piece faster!

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