

**“Fin de Siècle” —
ChamberFest at Mixon Hall (June 22)**

by Joshua Rosner



The audience at Mixon Hall was abuzz with anticipation Thursday night, June 22 for the fifth installment of the sixth season of ChamberFest Cleveland. “Fin de Siècle” (end of century) was a tapestry of compositions with roots in Austria from before and after the First World War. The evening consisted of works by Brahms, Ravel, and Korngold and was

designed to showcase pianist Orion Weiss, a Lyndhurst native.

Following a call for Chamberhood, a new program where patrons are invited to bring two friends who have never attended a ChamberFest concert, clarinetist Franklin Cohen, cellist Julie Albers, and Weiss strolled onto the stage. Brahms’s Trio, Op. 114 was written in an Austrian resort town after a yearlong creative block. The Allegro was performed with grace and joy as the melody jumped from instrument to instrument. A particularly delicate moment occurred when the clarinet and cello accompanied piano.

The lovely Adagio featured an absolutely perfect blend between Cohen and Albers. The third movement was filled with mimicry. After a gorgeous moment of decay from the ensemble, it became clear that these three musicians should have an entire evening devoted to this unique instrumentation. While the writing of the final movement feels less Brahmsian than the others, it was played with intensity. Finally the audience was able to release their pent-up energy as the Trio came to a close.

After an unfortunately long pause to bring a second piano onto the stage, Weiss returned with pianist Zoltán Fejérvári to interpret Ravel's *La Valse*. As the composer writes, the work is "a kind of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz" and a "fantastic and fatefully inescapable whirlpool." What began as an homage to Johann Strauss had become a surreal waltz, Vienna dancing its way into the First World War. Weiss and Fejérvári were entralling as a duo in this at times rough and harsh piece. It is rare and impressive to watch two pianists and hear one hundred seventy-six keys fly back and forth with remarkable choreography between the pianos and their partners. A waltz on so many different levels, this performance was superb.



Weiss was joined by violinists Alexi Kenney and Itamar Zorman and cellist Oliver Herbert for the final piece of the evening, Korngold's *Suite for Two Violins, Cello, and Piano Left Hand*. Written for Paul Wittgenstein, the famous pianist who fatefully lost his right arm on the Russian front, the Suite was Wittgenstein's second commission from the composer after a historic flop of a concerto.

Fortunately for the audience, even one half of Weiss performing is mesmerizing. Had one not watched it could have been as if there were still two pianists on stage with all sounds actually coming from Weiss' left hand! Though the piece is filled with impressive writing for the piano, the string writing mostly consists of octave doubling. It is not until the third movement — an ABA of loud and brash, stunning delicacy, and loud and brash once more — that Korngold provides an ensemble something with which they can really click. The following Lied is glorious and blossoms with somber melodies from the piano. The lush string writing sounds much richer than one would expect from two violins and a cello.



It was a stunning performance all-around. Zorman in particular was a joy to watch — happy to be making music and loving every phrase. While at times the Suite felt like a concerto for Weiss, Herbert and Kenney had many moments to shine as melodic soloists. The real phenomenon was how these four musicians listened to each other as though they too were in the audience.

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