

## **Brahms, Schubert & Schumann on Chagrin Series opener (October 15)**

by Robert Rollin



Last Sunday afternoon, October 15, the Chagrin Concert Series presented an exceptional concert of romantic music at Valley Lutheran Church in Chagrin Falls. The highlight was a magnificent performance of Johannes Brahms's f-minor Piano Quintet, Op. 34.

The Allegro non troppo begins with a powerful unison statement. Soon pianist Sungeun Kim's energetic playing

commanded the foreground, as the strings periodically emerged to double her.

After Kim's strong opening, first violinist Hristo Popov entered with a more lyric restatement supported by the other strings. Second violinist Barton Samuel Rotberg contributed some expressive solos as well. An attractive duet between Kim and Popov led to dark, low-register comments from cellist Michael Gelfand, sometimes joined by violist Wanda Sobieska.

As the movement progressed, the strings, led by Popov, began their own statements, the piano accompanying them with continued strident figures. Sobieska added some short melodious interjections, and Kim's emphasis on the upper notes of octave passages gave them a beautiful timbre.

The group negotiated the wide skips of the second theme to perfection. A charming F-major coda follows the recapitulation, cut short by the final return to the intense opening theme. The players' tempi, tone color, dynamics, phrasing, and ensemble were outstanding.

In the warm, inviting second movement Andante, the piano begins each bar with a Scottish snap (a sixteenth followed by a dotted-eighth), the strings accompanying with

upbeat groupings. Eighth-note triplets increase intensity in the middle section, then the opening idea returns for a relaxed close.

The beautiful C-minor Scherzo is replete with piquant syncopation. After it moved to duple meter, Kim's haunting piano ostinato was taken up by the entire ensemble. The ensemble's exciting fugato passages enlivened the flow.

The moody Finale moves from a slow, imitative introduction, to the exposition's Allegro non troppo. Later, developmental and recapitulatory material intermingle in distant keys. Kim and the string quartet exchanged graceful phrases, and the final change to Presto included intense syncopations and complex rhythms. The flawless performance ended in mid-measure with a rapid crescendo.

Rotberg and Kim opened the concert with a terrific performance of Franz Schubert's *Sonatina in a*, D. 385. The violinist's timbre in the first movement was simply stunning. His wide leaps transformed the piano's singing lines into music of great intensity. And when the music moved to major keys, the playing turned lighter, especially in the third theme's birdsong-like dialogue between Rotberg and Kim's left hand.

The duo gave the enchanting Andante's opening theme a simple Mozartian elegance, in contrast to two intriguing sections with intricate harmonies. The trio of the short Menuetto sparkled with charming chromatic twists.

The closing rondo features muscular exchanges of ascending passages between the two instruments. Rotberg and Kim made its complex sequences stunning.

Elsewhere on the program, Rotberg's full violin sound lent charm and beauty to Robert Schumann's short and openly lyrical *Intermezzo*, Op. 26. Kim supported him with lively triplets.

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