

ChamberFest Cleveland at CSU's AHA! Festival (June 8)

by Delaney Meyers



Violinist David Bowlin, pianist Roman Rabinovich, and cellist Oliver Herbert left no heartstrings un-tugged in ChamberFest Cleveland's debut performance at the AHA! Festival on Friday afternoon, June 8 in Drinko Hall at Cleveland State University.

The concert began with Janáček's mystical *Pohádka* ("Fairy Tale") for cello and piano. Rabinovich's soft touch at the opening

transported the audience to a wispy atmosphere, complementing Herbert's colorful playing. In the second movement, Herbert brought presence to his sound when needed, but was never forceful. The third movement is like a folk song of fairies: rustic in the cello, while still delicate in character with the piano's fast, light arpeggiations. Throughout the performance, Herbert tested the limits of the cello's softest dynamics, pulling the listener in. The performance was transfixing.

Equally enjoyable was Kodály's *Duo for Violin and Cello*, the beginning of which feels like traveling music with no particular destination. Bowlin and Herbert were clearly having a blast as they traded off the near-constant rhythmic motives that verge on rock-like in sections. From the first note until the last, their blend was stunning, both musicians playing with a remarkable sweetness of tone.

Herbert opened the second movement with an indefinable color, commented on seamlessly by Bowlin. The violin slowly takes over the expansive melody, only to have it return to the cello moments later. The goosebump-inducing next movement inspired a round of premature applause. The humor of the final movement was not lost on the

musicians, their sound alive and buoyant as they toyed with Kodály's signature, virtuosic folk melodies.

Hearing the performance of Brahms' beloved *Piano Trio in B* was like being in the most beautiful, ornate room that you never wanted to leave. Their accel- and deceleration in the first movement was smooth and organic, heroic melodies pouring out of their instruments. The trio's articulation in the Scherzo was springy yet skillfully controlled, their Brahmsian accents perfectly synchronised.

In the third movement, Rabinovich deftly captured the molasses quality of Brahms' writing as he slowly traveled from opposite ends of the keyboard into the middle again and again. The musicians handled the challenging and nuanced cascade that is the finale with ease, operating with a unified conception of the piece. During the second round of applause, the musicians were awarded with a "token of gratitude" by the AHA! Festival.

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